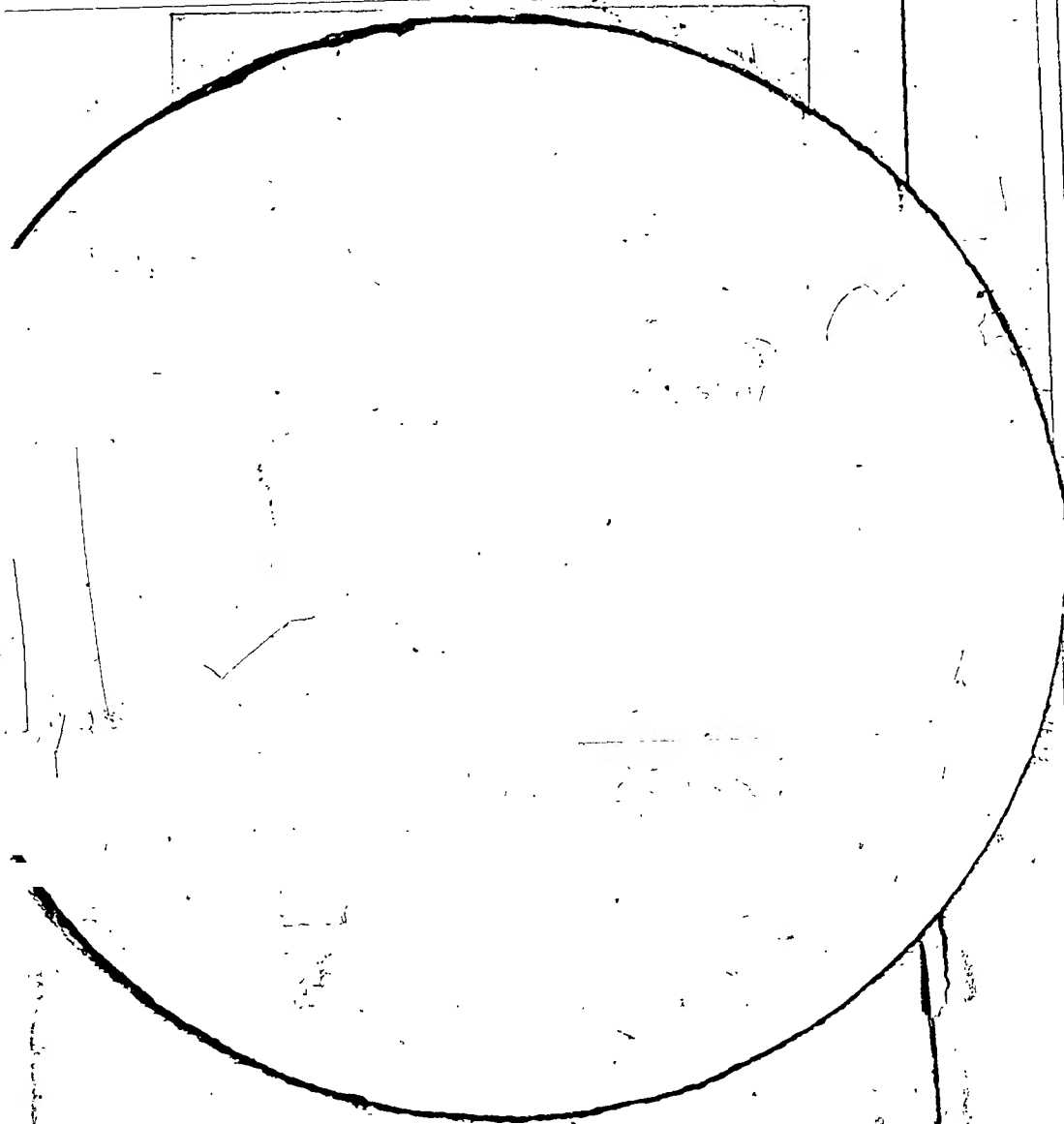


W.A. Foster

THE BLOOD LILIES



THE BLOOD LILIES

BY

W. A. FRASER.

AUTHOR OF
"MOOSWA," "THE OUTCASTS," ETC.

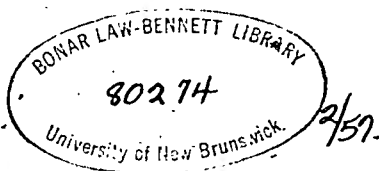
Illustrated by F. E. Schoonover

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ILLUSTR

The Indian and the Scot gave lo

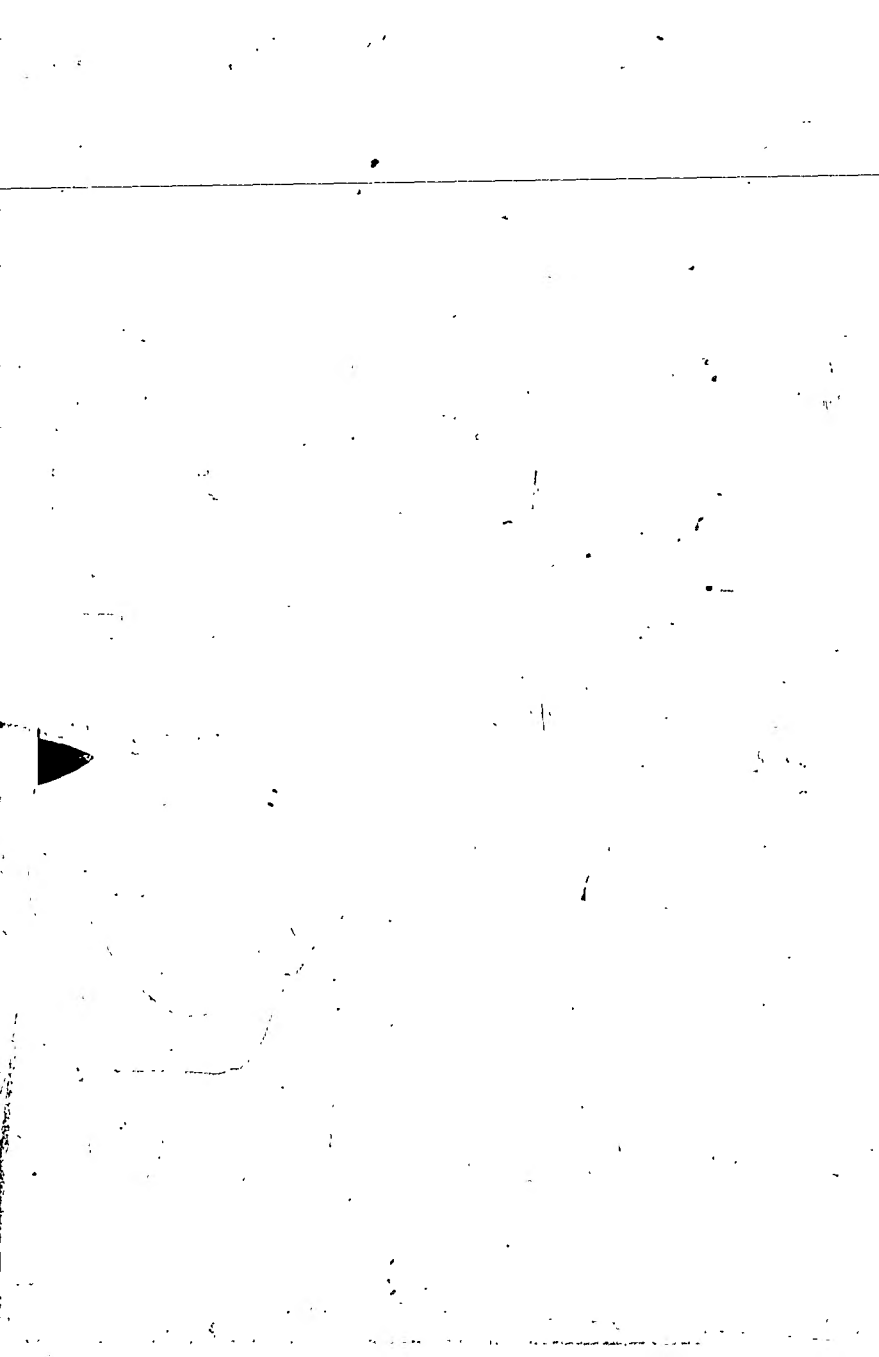
They struggled and panted .

To Descoigne lying in his shade

Mas-ki-sis (the Indian boy)

Her wail was like that of a she-w

Mas-ki-sis was chanting : "O Gr
angry"



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PROLOGUE

TO the tepee of Wolf Runner, the Cree, had come a little brave; and in the heavy face of Mi-yah-tis was the joy of motherhood.

"Mi-yah-tis" means the Ugly One, and no one had ever cried out against the injustice of the Cree woman's naming. She was entitled to it in its application to her lack of physical grace.

Then came the medicine-dreaming of a name for the little brave that was in the tepee of Wolf Runner. All through one summer night a medicine-man slept on the cone of a sand-hill, and, slumbering, listened for the dream-name the spirits would bring for the copper-tinged babe that lay swathed in a thick padding of softest muskeg moss.

In the morning the medicine-man came to the tepee where waited Wolf Runner and Mi-yah-tis, and looked down at the wee brown face that

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peeped from the corded moss-bag with a troubled look in his eyes.

"Is it a brave name, O Medicine-maker?" queried Wolf Runner.

The dreamer nodded; and the eagle feathers that were in his head-dress fluttered in pride.

"Is it a name of good fortune?" asked the Ugly One.

The dreamer shook his head reluctantly; and the eagle feathers drooped like death-plumes.

"Speak, O great Medicine-man," pleaded Wolf Runner.

"As I slept," said the dreamer, "I saw only a fierce red moon looking upon a prairie of blood lilies——"

"And the name?" asked the father.

"The red moon is the moon of disaster—of lameness; and the blood lilies are the lilies of bravery—the courage flowers. Manitou calls them to grow from the blood of braves who fell in battle; they grow many on the plains where our people slew the Blackfeet. The Lame One will be a great brave, full of courage."

"The Lame One!" cried Mi-yah-tis in a voice of pain.

"That is the name?" asked Wolf Runner.

"Yes; Mas-ki-sis, the Lame One. But he will do a brave thing—will be a great brave."

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"And the evil, the lameness?" asked Mi-yah-tis—for she was a mother.

"The red moon of crying will be at the time of the blood lilies."

Thus was the naming of Mas-ki-sis the Cree, son of Wolf Runner and Mi-yah-tis.

CHAPTER I

THE Saskatchewan, coffee-brown in spring from the Rocky Mountain floods, blue-green at the time of little water in summer, now rumbled down an ice-roofed tunnel in greeting to Fort Donald as it swept on to Lake Winnipeg.

And from this post to Fort Garry—which was Winnipeg—lay a water-trail of five hundred miles.

Fort Donald was somnolent. The post had a bear's habit of hibernating until wakened by the incoming trappers with the winter kill of fur.

It was Sandy Cameron's Malcolm who anticipated this annual eruption of interest, and threw the old Hudson's Bay post into vibrant unrest, by proclaiming that he would marry Factor Louis Gourelot's Franchette.

Malcolm, being possessed of the love-blindness, did not see the difficulties; but Cameron the elder did; Gourelot, the nimble-witted, did also; and the whole station knew it was impossible. The Church stood in the way—two of them; for Sandy the Scot was a Calvinist ultra, and Gourelot was all but a priest of the Roman Church.

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Love may laugh at locksmiths, who are bunglers at best, but when the Priesthood and the Kirk stand shoulder to shoulder in the breach—ah, Messieurs, that is a different matter.

With Hieland obduracy Cameron the elder stood out against it; except, of course, the Gourelot lass should renounce the evil ways of Rome.

And with the French factor, fat and verbose, heretics might be tolerated in a matter of furs and trade, but in a blood relationship—"Sacré! nevair!" unless the garçon came into the fold of the true Church. How else could it be? One religion was trouble enough in adherence; but two faiths in one family—"Mon Dieu!" Gourelot snapped his fingers in derision.

The fort dwellers took up the matter with the fierce energy of minds that are like empty tenements. Always sleeping on their arms, with eruptive longings, the Catholics and Protestants would have arrayed themselves in fierce opposition on a much slighter pretext. Why did not the Cameron choose one of his own red-headed barbarians? Why was not the beautiful, black-eyed Franchette content with some one of the many suitors that were already of her own faith?

Franchette sighed at the cruelty of her people; and the Scot swore by the power of the great

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Wallace that he'd marry the French maiden if he had to slay every Papist in Fort Donald.

Now, men of the west, where the law is entirely of themselves, are of great common-sense; and Sandy was a very Solomon, even among canny Scots; so he said not overmuch, but harnessed his astute mind to the problem that threatened disaster to Fort Donald, and wrestled with it for three days and three nights. At the end of that time he had an interview with the French factor; and soon the post knew that an armistice had been proclaimed, and a solemn compact entered into between the Scot and the Gaul. The new thing that Sandy had evolved—for it was all his doing—was of greater delight to these men of the open than even the prospect of much sectarian bloodshed. It had all the elements of a western holiday.

The wedding *would* take place. And the question of spiritual supremacy would be settled by the ability of the Church's apostles to cover three hundred miles of territory by dog-train in the dead of winter. That was the compact. Father Lemoine was at St. Ambrose, three hundred miles away, and the Rev. Ross Bruce was at Buffalo Neck, twenty miles deeper in the western horizon. For the upholding of the established church, and, in-

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cidentally, for the delight of his soul, the young Cameron would take himself as swiftly as he might over the long trail to Buffalo Neck and bring the "meenister" to tie the knot; as emissary of the Gourelot way of belief Joseph Descoigne would hasten eagerly forward for the little priest at St. Ambrose.

And the essence of the compact was that whichever one of the ordained first crossed the Gourelot threshold should perform the ceremony, and the children that would surely accrue from this union be of his faith.

Small wonder that Fort Donald recked not of peltries, nor of the crop of fat buffalo, nor of anything but the foot-race between the Church of Rome and the Church of England.

There was nothing in the world lacking to make it a true contest, for also was Joseph in love with Franchette; and if he *must* lose her, what glory in humbling his rival and gaining a victory for his loved Mother of Rome.

Sandy afforded himself the prodigal luxury of a smile as he watched with canny eye the hilarious preparations of his antagonists. He had made a proper Scotch deal. Few men in the north could trail with Malcolm, and fewer still with Bruce, the minister. That this was unknown to the

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French party troubled not at all the conscience of Cameron. What Bruce lacked in Jesuitical subtlety he made up in length of limb and the endurance of a Blackfoot. Sandy calculated that he would win by a day, though he did not forget that fate and the elements were also in the contest. At any rate he had planned wisely, and the outcome must rest with the Lord.

They would start at once. It was half a moon till Christmas, and the wedding would give a fillip to the saturnalia of frisking that always laid Fort Donald by the heels for a week.

In the morning Malcolm harnessed to his birchwood cariole four big dogs of mixed origin—Scotch stag-hounds, save for the blend of savage blood that had come from their Northwest mother. In this he took a gambler's chance; fleet^{er} of foot than the husky dogs Joseph decked with gayly beribboned harness, yet, if a blizzard came, or a cutting ice-crust formed on the snow, they would suffer more than the hardy, big-footed beasts of the Frenchman's choosing.

But the Scot was provident. Full fifty pounds of frozen white fish he stowed in the cariole as rations for his train. That should land them at Buffalo Neck without precarious reliance upon food by the wayside. With his own bacon, bannock, and blankets, his dogs had full weight; so he

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would ride not at all, trusting to his strong legs for transport over the three hundred miles.

Not even Captain Ball, the red-faced Irishman who was master of the Company's steamer in summer, and who had lain for two weeks of a fiercely wrenched ankle, was aloof from the starting-point when Malcolm and Joe Descoigne lined up at the Hudson's-Bay-store.—Friend Gourelot made a little speech—he was given to this habit; and Franchette, standing just behind his broad back, wiped her big black eyes furtively. In her heart was a terrible apprehension, but she was not crying—not at all, it was the bitter wind. Once she had asked Père Gourelot to choose some other runner than Joseph; she had seen something in his small, cruel eyes, but had not spoken of it, only pleaded that some other might go to bring the little father—there were plenty of good runners to choose from.

"Are you read-ee?" asked the factor.

The tall, square-shouldered Scot for answer swung on the heel of his moccasin, took a step, and held out his hand to Franchette. In the girl's heart lay strong the dread thought that had come from the evil look in Descoigne's eyes. It stirred her to a strange, sudden impulse. She raised her face to receive her lover's kiss. Then, with cheeks red from the fire of timid remorse, she fled.

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As he turned to his place Cameron saw in the eyes of Joe Descoigne that which had frightened Franchette.

"A'tim!" he said, sharply—the same meaning "a dog"; and only Joseph knew that he was not speaking to his hounds.

"Are you read-ee?" repeated Gourelot. Then, loudly, "Marse!"

Like the crackle of Martinis came a volley from the dog-whips as the two men lashed at their trains. Then over the frozen snow sped the swift-footed dogs, and behind, line in hand, with Indian lope, followed the rivals.

A babel of demoniac cries from redskin, and half-breed, and paleface rose on the clear, crisp air. Many lean-throated, deep-lunged train huskies took up the cry, until the log shack that was the Company's store rocked on its foundation of deep-frozen earth. Like the bellow of a buffalo bull, above the shriller din was heard the Scotch voice of big, gaunt Sandy Cameron in the old battle-cry of his forefathers, "The Bruce! The Bruce!"

A dozen young men of the post, priding in their fleetness of foot, had chased after the two Argonauts in an exhilaration of excitement. Now they were trudging back; and over the crest of a distant hill Malcolm and Joseph were slipping

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from sight—like the spars of a ship taking the curve of the sea.

“Faith, it’ll be the hottest race in the Territories,” opinionated Ball; “I’ll bet tin skins that Sandy’s Malcolm does him up.”

Eagerly the French party took the captain’s wager, for who that is an Indian, or of the Indian’s existence, is not a gambler. The taint hangs to their life of chance like smoke to the place of fire.

At thirty miles Malcolm spelled his dogs for a smoke and a few minutes of rest; but Descoigne flitted on through the forest, and the Scot saw him no more. Malcolm wondered at the cunning Frenchman’s present lack of astuteness. Joseph would most certainly do up his dogs, for they were of a plodding kind. With Celtic precision he himself had mapped out the three hundred miles into six days’ travel, and too much haste at the start meant maimed slowness at the end.

That night, by intuition knowing that he had reeled off his full fifty miles, Malcolm brushed the fleece of snow from the brown skin of the earth in a clump of gnarled jack-pine, built a huge fire of wood, eager of flame because of its resin, and, wrapped in his warm rabbit-robe, close huddled to his dogs, feet to fire, slept a sleep of nothingness.

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In the hour that is fierce in its ice breath, the hour before dawn, he stirred the embers, paid light tribute to his hunger, and under the blinking stars that caught at the frost diamonds which decked the jack-pines and flashed them blue and red and gold, he sped on again to the bringing of the Bruce.

All that day there was only the snow-muffled trail of Joseph to tell him of his rival. Over and over again he muttered: "The French fool! I have him! His dogs, that are not swift, will die because of this."

But even as he reviled Descoigne as a fool, in the other's folly was the method of an evil thought.

The Frenchman sped on till he came to the tepee of Wolf Runner—Wolf Runner the Solitary, at Vermilion Lake.

As the bells on Descoigne's huskies tinkled down the frost-snapping air the Indian's dogs set up a howl of forbidding defiance.

The Cree sprang from his camp-fire to the open, and driving back the fang-showing brutes with a loaded dog-whip, welcomed the visitor.

"Ho, Boy! come in. There is tea in the tepee."

But Descoigne declined the hospitality; he did not want the Scotchman to find him there.

"I go me to Calf Shirt's, brother," he replied

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in Cree. "You are Wolf Runner; is that not true?"

The Indian nodded.

"And thou are killing fur for Ladouceur, the Free Trader?"

"Perhaps," answered the Cree, suspiciously; "~~I will sell the kill of fur perhaps to Ladouceur.~~"

"Mewasin (good). We are brothers in enmity to the Company. They, our tyrants, have sent one who is of the accursed Protestant faith to make war on the Free Traders."

The Indian's bead eyes snapped viciously. Descoigne chuckled sardonically to himself. He had touched on the one bitter interest in the red man's life—the monopoly of the Company had more than once goaded them to bloodshed.

"One follows," he continued, "who hastens to obtain evidence against Ladouceur and his friends; also other traders."

"But the tea," cried Wolf Runner; "come to the fire and drink tea, and smoke—Mi-yah-tis will make tea for us."

"I must hasten," answered Descoigne. "Can you not put astray this evil one of the accursed faith who follows, to the end that I may warn all men who are not slaves to the Company?"

"It is like a fox standing against a wolf-pack," answered Wolf Runner. "The Company make

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a strong hunt when they are on the trail of one man."

The Frenchman understood; the Indian hesitated to draw the wrath of the Company upon himself.

"Listen, nichie," Descoigne said; "is not Factor-Gourelot of the same faith; is he not of the flock of the little father; and is not the one who follows me a heretic? This trouble for the Free Traders is from the Company at Fort Garry; the big ogama at Fort Garry has done this thing. If this is not true, why am I here?"

The Indian eyed Descoigne suspiciously. The latter proceeded:

"The factor will be pleased if you take this trouble off his hands, nichie. See; he has even sent this tobacco, and ten skins in good money—here it is. The moneas, who is a heretic, will surely make here for his night camp. Do you send him on the blind trail that loses itself in the great muskeg. What I have said is all true—by our faith it is true. Now I go. Do you this thing, and there will always be food to your eating at Fort Donald."

The Frenchman, leaving his subtle lie to rankle in the Indian's mind, slipped down the trail through the poplars, and presently the silver note of his dog-bells was lost in the forest.

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Wolf Runner stood watching the swinging cariole as it glided over the white floor of the western trail, and in his mind, always fierce in resentment, rankled the poisoned thought that those who were not bondmen to the Company were forever and ever persecuted. In reality it was years since there had been violent prosecution of Free Traders, but this Cree of the forest knew not of the changed law.

As Wolf Runner turned to his tepee the dark face of Mi-yah-tis suddenly vanished from its doorway, and he found her busy over the fire.

"Did the moneas speak of our little Mas-ki-sis?" the Cree woman asked presently. "Did he see little Otter down the trail?"

"No," the husband answered. "This is indeed the thin year for wapoos (the rabbit), and Mas-ki-sis sets his snares at a far distance. Still it is cold, and he should be here in the lodge."

"The moneas had much talk," hazarded the Ugly One, questioningly. "The French are so full of speech that perhaps they sometimes come to lies."

"He is our friend," answered Wolf Runner, "and his talk was for our good, and the good of Ladouceur."

"He is also French," retorted Mi-yah-tis.

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At that instant the harsh-throated dogs huddled at the door again set up a discordant challenge.

"It's the one," commented Wolf Runner, thrusting his head through the door-flap.

"And Mas-ki-sis!" exclaimed the squaw, peering over his shoulder.

Wolf Runner stepped through the opening, and the boy, tumbling from Malcolm's cariole, ran shyly to his mother in the tepee.

It was now twelve seasons of the Blood Lilies reddening, and the lameness of disaster had not come to him.

"The big ogama came on the trail as I was carrying these three wapoos, and made me ride behind his beautiful dogs," said Mas-ki-sis to Mi-yah-tis.

"Ho, nichie! can I make camp in your tepee?" the Scotchman asked.

"It is time to make camp, and there is room," answered Wolf Runner.

Malcolm threw a frozen white-fish to each of the dogs. He brought forth his bacon and tea and passed them to Mi-yah-tis. Custom indicated that they would all sup from the guest's provisions, which they did. Then he smoked his tobacco, even the Ugly One filling her little gray stone pipe from the yellow leaf.

The Indian spoke little. Had Malcolm been

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communicative, Descoigne's evil plan might have gone awry, but in his young love of Franchette, that was so great a thing, he was sensitive, possessed of inherent Scotch reticence. It and his mission were not something to be discussed with a redskin. So, when Wolf Runner, yielding to his Indian curiosity, asked with feigned indifference the whyfor of this midwinter trip, he parried the questions or answered not at all.

The Northland is a land of much free discussion, and when the guest sought to conceal the motives of his journey it was proof to the Cree that he was possessed of duplicity.

When the white man, in a desire to please Wolf Runner, questioned him of his trapping luck, the Indian's suspicions were increased; surely it was as Descoigne had said.

So when Malcolm asked of the western trail, if there were any short cuts in the knowledge of the Indian, Wolf Runner told him of the blind trail that was through the great muskeg and over Mah-chee Manitou's tepee; only the Indian did not give it its evil name, but called it Long Lake. He took a large sheet of birch-bark, and on its pink parchment mapped with a willow charcoal the secret path as it wound through the big muskeg, many miles in extent.

First there was the stream which came from the

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great swamp to Vermilion—this Wolf Runner indicated on the birch-bark with a wavering black line; and after that the little dots, which were the long tamaric swamp that Malcolm was to skirt; then the flat that would be smooth snow, because in summer there grew only the soft gray velvet of bottomless moss. On Wolf Runner's map this was a blank oval. And then were the black trunks of spruce that had been killed by the great fire, a generation before, dead sentinels of a living past.

After that the ogama, holding the sun on his left cheek, would come to the little stream that ran into Long Lake; and the stream, being frozen, would be like a smooth road. And there was the lake, and at this point, through a cleft in the hill-barrier, cut the trail; and so to the other side. And the gain would be full four hours of swift running. In summer no man might cross the muskeg, for it was bottomless; therefore they knew not of its winter path—only Wolf Runner—and now Malcolm, because of the birch-bark.

The Indian would send Mas-ki-sis with the ogama in the morning to show him where the short trail forked from the long, and into the muskeg.

As Wolf Runner set his trap for the white man whom he thought a spy because of Descoigne's lies, the Ugly One, whose heavy face

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seemed devoid of interest, telegraphed from the little furtive eyes a measure of discontent to Mas-ki-sis. Once, as the husband talked, she passed the back of her right hand under the palm of her left; the boy knew that in their sign language this meant underhanded dealing.

Joyously the next morning the Scot followed his lean hounds; because of the knowledge he had from Wolf Runner he would steal hours from the long trail, and his rival, hastening on, would lose this chance.

With him went little Mas-ki-sis, trailing behind the cariole with his small snow-shoes strapped to his back.

The Scot knew not that the little pagan was an embodied good angel that Franchette's prayers had won to the protection of her lover.

When the first bend of the trail into the forest hid Wolf Runner's tepee, Malcolm stopped his dogs and lifted Mas-ki-sis to the cariole.

In the little lad's mind a jumble of thoughts worked. The big ogama was possessed of a good heart—that much was certain; also there was no such trail as Wolf Runner, the father, had drawn with the willow charcoal; and if the ogama passed into the muskeg of dread, he would find not his way to the other side of Evil Spirit Lake, nor anywhere.

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Mi-yah-tis ~~had~~ told him that all this was because of lies which had been spoken by the other white man.

The lad well knew where the blind trail turned into the muskeg—just at the swamp's edge where was an old bear's deadfall; but as they passed it, the dogs swift running, Mas-ki-sis blinked his round black eyes and saw nothing but the gay rosettes that were on the train-harness.

Malcolm, trusting the fork in the trail to his guide, nestled the memory of Franchette in his mind and ran as one blind. At last it was even his hunger that told the Scotchman he had travelled far. He spoke to Mas-ki-sis of the trail. The boy did not answer. Malcolm, running at the side of his cariole, looked down at the little dark face—the eyes were closed.

"The kid's asleep, whatever!" he exclaimed; and once more the dogs were stopped, and something that felt like a bear's paw was shaking the lad by the shoulder.

If Malcolm had been at all a suspicious Scot he might have thought the eyes a little too slow in parting their lids, considering the rough awakening. But Mas-ki-sis was acting; he was very much awake, and the assumed sleep was a phase of his woodland cunning.

Yes, they had passed the trail to the muskeg,

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long ago, Mas-ki-sis admitted; the ogama must not be angry; he was tired—it was so warm in the rabbit-robe, and he had fallen asleep.

Yes, it was difficult to find the fork into the muskeg; also it was far on the back-trail.

“Get oot, get oot!” roared Malcolm, angry beyond count. “All nichies are liars, damn liars; I don’t believe there’s a trail at all just.”

With precipitate energy Mas-ki-sis tumbled from the cariole and fled from the wrath of the ogama.

Malcolm, angry that he had missed the short cut, but fearing to risk loss of time by returning, sped forward.

Toward evening he topped a hill, and behind him was the lake of Mah-chee Manitou. He had missed the short cut, but he marked it for his return—he would steal from Descoigne then the four hours.

Mas-ki-sis had added miles to his journey of return by his act of goodness; but even in his untutored mind was a something that tied wings to his feet and shortened the leagues of snow-path, so that he came again to Vermilion in exhilaration of spirit.

Mi-yah-tis, his mother, looked into his eyes with a question, and Mas-ki-sis looked back again. Then the old squaw put her huge hand on the

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little head, and stroked the braids of black hair, and pitied him for being tired, and gave him a delicious "Boulee."

That night the snow fell, and to Buffalo Neck Malcolm found not even the trail of Descoigne.

That was nothing; up the Saskatchewan were three roads—one on the river-ice, and one either side.

CHAPTER II

ON the sixth day Malcolm came to Buffalo Neck, and Ross Bruce learned how loudly the Kirk called for him, at Fort Donald.

The Rev. Ross Bruce was in the Church of England because of zeal for his fellow-Scots. The Presbyterians had paid not overmuch attention to the spiritual welfare of the Scots who had gone afield to the American Northland; the ardor of their missions was expended in a different part of the globe. The Bruce had become an Anglican that he might labor in a field wherein he might be cheered at times by a Scotch burr in the responses.

And at St. Ambrose also was Joe Descoigne knocking at the door of Father Lemoine. What matter that his dogs were done for; it was not in the compact that he should not take a fresh train, and at the mission were many of a full-fed strength. The little priest chuckled softly through his fat throat when the Frenchman spoke of the Scotch heretic's stupidity in overlooking this fact. By the Virgin! all the heretics were blind of their

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own folly. The outcast teacher of lies, M'sieu Bruce, never had dogs; and, if he had, they were starvelings, because of the accursed poverty of the heretical Protestants.

Joseph spoke not of Wolf-Runner and the evil lake. Perhaps even then the hated Malcolm was dead in its poison waters.

The Bruce was not more eager to the good cause than was the little father; and the next morning, behind fresh dogs, close muffled in fur, went the plump embodiment of the power of Rome toward the watchers at Fort Donald.

The Kirk ran. With long strides the guardian of its hopes in that hopeless land hurried beside his "brither Scot": love, and Christian zeal, and the glory of Old Scotia were fierce-pointed goads that drove the two stalwarts in silent haste over league after league of marble snow that shimmered back the blinding light of the sun.

The big hounds had six days of harness strain upon them, as against the plump weight of the man-of-confession that steadied the eager flight of Descoigne's strong-limbed huskies.

So for three days, almost without speech, the two parties glided through the wilderness with no sight of each other.

On the fourth, at the lone pine, which was Malcolm's mark for the secret trail, he took the sun

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over his right shoulder, called "Yuh!" to the dogs, and set his face for Long Lake.

In two hours they came to the edge of the lake. With a cry of joy Malcolm pointed across its narrow bosom, saying, "I have knocked four hours from the trail." Bruce was looking at a fringe of black water that cut a thin slice between ice and shore.

"Who told you of this trail?" he asked, suddenly.

"Wolf Runner."

"Wolf Runner—Wolf Runner of the Miteo sect! Lad, if you once set foot on yon ice you'd be in at no wedding; it's the Deil's tepee; do you not see his breath?" He pointed to wreaths of yellow vapor that sputtered at many places.

"Do ye say, Minister, it's Mah-chee's tepee—the Death Lake?" queried Malcolm, with a solemn face.

"Ay, lad; it's full of sulphur springs, and the ice is fair treacherous. No man risks his life on yon lake. And beyond it is the fierce muskeg that never gives up its victim."

"I was in gran' luck I didn't find it going," cried Malcolm.

"You were in favor of God," corrected the minister.

"I'll settle with Wolf Runner for this," declared

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Malcolm, fiercely; "I'll tak' a grip of the dog's throat that'll land him in a hotter place than Devil's Lake."

"Cameron," said Bruce, warningly, "you must not make threats like that; the Lord didn't save you for the purpose of murder. Think of the wedding, lad. And now for the back trail; we must circle the lake."

"It's queer that I didn't think of it, for I've heard many times of yon dev'lish hole."

"There are few know of it, lad," replied Bruce, "for the Indians will not talk about it."

The four hours that Malcolm would have stolen from Joe Descoigne became a gift of five to the Frenchman.

As they swung around the north end of the lake they struck the furrow of Joseph's sled. Malcolm gave a sharp cry of disappointment. Wolf Runner's trick had held him in its leash while his opponent slipped into the lead.

"Two hours," panted the Bruce, pointing to the new-turned snow, as they sped on again. At three miles the Frenchman's way forked to the left. Malcolm braced himself to the line of his cariole, and stopped his hounds with a sharp "Whoa!"

"What's he up to now?" he queried of Bruce.

"It's no trick; the priest goes by way of Metis

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Mission—it lies yonder. Joseph runs light in rations because of the little father's weight; he'll have fish for his dogs and grub for themselves from Father Le Fevre; I'm thinkin' they'll make camp there for the night."

"Marse!" cried Malcolm, and once more, at a swinging dog-lope, the Anglican Church, leader and adherent, cut at the distance that was between it and the vanquishing of its enemies.

In the young Scot's heart was a lust for the punishment of Wolf Runner. The Western school of ethics had fashioned his mind to the dogma that death was but fair justice for one who had attempted a cowardly murder. To hold in his sinewy hands the lying throat of this treacherous one would be a fierce joy. If Wolf Runner fought back until one of their lives went out in the struggle, it would be the redskin's.

Bruce knew. From under his shaggy Scotch brows he read all these dark thoughts in his companion's face. If he could help it, they should not reach to Vermilion that night. There was sure to be an angry quarrel leading to worse.

"Where do we make camp?" he asked.

"In Wolf Runner's tepee," answered Malcolm.

"The dogs are tired—they go slower," hazarded the minister. "It grows dark early, too," he added, suddenly aware of the fact that the trail

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lay dim to their feet. "Better out-span and spell," he suggested, speaking again; "a cup of tea for ourselves and a fish to the dogs'll carry us to the nichie's."

Malcolm checked his hounds; and Bruce, wrenching some dwarf red-willows from their rotted roots, set about building a fire.

Malcolm straightened himself up suddenly as a singing moan came through the attuned spikes of the gloomed pines. The wind chilled his cheek as though he had dipped it in quick-evaporating spirits. It was like a kiss from death-lips. He moistened his palm and held it up. Ere the arm was straight his hand was ice-coated.

"What's wrong, lad?" asked the minister.

"There's something uncanny in the wind," answered Cameron, nodding his head toward the west. "I'm thinkin' we'd best pull out soon's we've stowed this tucker; we must hustle a bit." As they drank the hot tea, Malcolm pointed at the hound leader, who was sniffing and cocking his nose restlessly down the dark vault of the deep pines.

"Wallace scents it," he said.

"The storm?" queried the minister.

The other nodded, and, rising, threw the tin tea-kettle into the cariole. "Let's get a move on," he admonished.

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The minister answered something, but a wail from the forest drowned his voice to a whisper.

"Quick, man!" called Cameron.

"Too late," bellowed the deep voice of Bruce in his ear; "you'd not get a hundred yards—you'd be smithered; the dogs—gather them!"

Ross Bruce was a madman. In frenzy he wrenched brown-barked willow after willow, and threw them close to the fire that flared angrily as the rising wind smote at the embers.

"Make camp! make camp!" he yelled; and Malcolm turned the sled sideways to the storm that was now driving splinters of steel—diamond-pointed fragments of ice—into his face. That was for a barricade that the snow might pile up and shelter them. The dogs knew. Tremblingly they huddled closer to the toboggan. Then the two men piled the fuel on top of the sled. They were like fitful shadows as they struggled and panted in the gloom that was hastened by the swirling storm.

"Turn in!" roared Bruce, clutching at Malcolm and drawing him down where the hounds lay.

"Keep the dogs close; they'll warm us—it's perishin' cold," cried Malcolm. "The fire'll not stand—we must just trust to the dogs."

"And the Lord, lad," admonished Bruce.

Back to back, roofed by the rabbit-robies turned

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to a white shroud, the two men lay, while the hounds, whining with instinctive fear, edged closer and closer about them. Even the fire was fighting for its life as Bruce, with a sweep of his mighty arm, threw faggots upon it.

"I'm thinkin', Minister," said Malcolm.

"I'm shivering," retorted Bruce.

"I'm thinkin'," repeated Malcolm, "that we may be here for three days and nights, like Jonah in the whale's belly."

"Jonah was warm," commented the minister.

"We'll not starve, Minister. I have a ration of bacon under my head."

The fierce struggle of preparation over, Malcolm was talking to reassure his comrade, thinking the minister was perhaps a little in dread of the life that was new to him—the blizzard phase of it.

At that instant the hound leader sprang to his feet, bristles erect, and howled.

"Down, Wallace; down, you brute!" commanded Cameron, for the dog's rush had sent the blizzard swirling under their cover.

A faint cry smote on their ears.

"It's the storm," said the minister.

Malcolm pointed at the hound for answer.

"Minister, it's a body lost!" he exclaimed the next instant, and, plunging forward, he went reel-



They struggled and panted . . . in the swirling storm.

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ing into the tossing waves of snow that were like angry waters.

"Bruce!" came his voice almost at once, and in the gale it sounded a mile away.

The minister struggled out to where the other tugged at something in the white sea. They were not twenty yards from their camp, but it was a bitter fight to win back with the man they had salvaged. The two giants were as children in the arms of the whirlwind; its breath was a drug—it smothered their senses; the driven snow was like shot, it lashed their eyelids closed; they waded through huge billows that swept them back like a receding tide; demoniac voices screamed at them, from the tortured pines. Clutched in their numbed fingers was a swaying something that might have been a rag-doll but for its weight. At fitful intervals red tongues from their fire licked at the swirling snow and beacons the haven they battled for. At last they won to the shelter of their barricade, and Bruce piled faggots on the fire.

Into the place that was a nest of dogs, and rabbit-robbs, deep in a white fleece, they hauled the one that had come up out of nowhere.

"An Indian!" said Bruce, as the flames lighted up the man's face.

"Two of them!" cried Malcolm, as for the

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first time he saw that a small figure was clasped in the arms of the helpless derelict. "My God, it's Wolf Runner and the cub!" he ejaculated.

The black-beaded pupils set like points of jet in the red-and-yellow-streaked eyes of the Indian glinted evilly; the clutch of the blizzard that had all but choked him had been taken from his throat, and his life, almost gone out, was slowly ebbing back.

"Out with the dog!" panted the young Scot.

A strong hand was laid on his arm, and a pair of lips at his ear said solemnly, though the wind whipped the tones into gasps: "You're a Scotchman—and a Christian. We're all in the hands of the Lord. You couldna ask for His help with murder in your soul."

The blizzard took up the last words, and shrieked off into the pines with a ghostly chuckle. It sounded so to Malcolm, suddenly stricken with the knowledge of what his act would have been.

Then the lips came close to his ear again, and said: "He's thin-clad; he's starved with the cold—I'm feared the bairn's dead—haul them in between us."

Without a word of remonstrance Malcolm allowed the minister—even helped him—to pull the Indian against his back.

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Then the three men, minister, the evil red-skin against whose breast was Maş-ki-sis, and the betrothed of Franchette, lay close huddled with the four hounds, and fought in silence a many-houred battle for their lives.

For a time Bruce kept wood on the fire, just with a sweep of his long arm; but at last the storm smothered the blaze, and they lay silent, as men who sleep or are dead.

Sometimes through the hours of night the Bruce stretched his big hand across in silent query; each time it was clasped by Malcolm in assurance. Once the Indian tapped Bruce's arm, and in his fingers was a caress of thankfulness.

The day came, just a gray shadow; the storm almost blotted the light into darkness. The snow was drifted deep over their covering, and the barricade of sled and brush had grown into a great mound. It was best to lie still. By and by if hunger gnawed fierce they could perhaps eat of the raw bacon.

Toward night the blizzard went away from them like a beaten enemy. It did not cease gradually, it did not grow less, it went away; and calm, that had been not, was everywhere.

In the west, low to the south, just glinting the tree-tops, the sun smiled a cold, wan good-night, and the three men rose up out of the snow-cavern

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and looked at each other in the evening light of reprieve — Minister, Indian, and Lover. And Mas-kī-sis, warmed back to life, sat crouched like a young bird in the nest that had been their salvation.

CHAPTER III

WHILE the Kirk had shivered in the fierce blast, the trusted of Rome had rested warm and safe at Metis Mission—saved by a miracle, otherwise a game of chess.

When the fat priest at St. Ambrose clasped Father Lemoine in his glad arms he smiled in content. The new move! Surely he would vanquish his old enemy at the board of little squares with the new attack.

And when Joseph said that they would sup and hasten forward to cover a few leagues before the night camp, the good priest fought against it.

"But the little matter of Fort Donald," Father Lemoine pleaded.

"Bah!" retorted Father Le Fevre; "a badger-haired Scot! What mattered which way of faith he followed."

"But there would be the saving of many souls," Father Lemoine interposed. The Gourelots were people of large families; and as for the Scots, they filled the land with their offsprings. There would surely be many souls for the saving, sobeit they

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were brought up in the true Church. Yes, they *would* go forward; but, as compromise, just one little game of chess would Father Lemoine grant.

And as the king, and queen, and pawns claimed the priestly fingers, so the eager combat claimed their godly minds, until the voice of Joseph took them rudely from their paradise.

"She come, she come!" he was saying at the open door. "Look you here, good Father, is it not a true blizzard?"

And when it had grown to a full force, Father Le Fevre said: "My little game was the will of God. A mile on the trail and you had perished."

Many times Joe Descoigne peered forth into the darkness, and in his heart was an unholy thought that his rival boiled at the bottom of the Mah-chee tepee, or lay cold in icy death in the fierce blizzard that surely no man could withstand.

Once, and it was growing late, Father Lemoine, speaking, perhaps to the prelate, or perhaps it was to Joseph, said: "We have been saved from death. I will go and pray and ask the Holy Mother that our poor friends may be saved too. To die out there in the cold is terrible. They are not of our faith, but they are brothers, because they have souls."

And the little priest, who had hastened to the

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call of his Church, knelt and prayed for the lives of the two men against whom he strove.

And at Fort Donald, Franchette besought of the Virgin the life of her lover; and big Cameron walked the floor of his shack as it trembled in the wind's grasp, and all night the great gaunt eyes closed not at all.

CHAPTER IV

NEAR to Vermilion the three men whose lives had been left with them stood looking at each other in silence.

The minister was wondering whether the hate had softened in the heart of Malcolm. It was the young Scot who spoke first.

"Will ye try for Vermilion to-night, Minister? There's npt a sup of grub for man or beast but the bacon, it is all buried beyond finding in the snow."

The hounds were in a pitiable condition; the cold had almost frozen them to death.

Malcolm took no notice of the Indian. The evidence of the wrath of God in the storm, and His goodness in sparing their lives, had given a solemn check to his passion. It had stayed his hand, but there was no forgiveness in his thoughts. The Indian could go his way like some wild animal he spared out of compassion.

He and the Bruce dug the sled from its mountain of snow, harnessed the dogs, gathered their robes, and were ready to start.

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"What of the wee niechie, Malcolm?" queried Bruce.

"He has his father," answered Cameron.

"Ay, but I doubt they'll make Vermilion. We must take the lad, Malcolm."

"The dogs are done for," objected Cameron.

"We must take the bairn if I have to carry him," declared Bruce, firmly.

"Well, well; put him on the sled," cried Malcolm, giving in. "You're right, Minister; I'm unreasonin' mad, that's all."

Wolf Runner had stood waiting while the two white men discussed something in their unknown tongue. When Mas-ki-sis was lifted to the cariole by Bruce, and the hounds reluctantly, weakly, stretched to the collars, the Indian, on his snowshoes, swung in ahead of them, and set his face toward Vermilion. Bruce nodded to Malcolm in commendation. "Heed that, lad; the Indian breaks the trail for the dogs. Man! but the snow is deep!"

Their progress was slow. Once Malcolm went forward, and, touching Wolf Runner on the shoulder, pointed him to go back—he would break the trail. The Indian shook his head and hastened forward.

"Let him go," cried Bruce. "You'll need all

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your strength, happen the others camped at Metis Mission."

"And if they didn't," retorted Malcolm, "I'm thinkin' there's no hurry."

"When we were safe ourselves last night I just asked the Lord the favor of their saving. They're of Rome, but they're humans—fellow-beings," said the minister, simply.

With a good trail they should have fetched Vermillion in three hours. Now it was midnight when they came to the welcome shelter of Wolf Runner's buffalo-hide wigwam.

As they neared it, coming wearily, slowly up out of the forest like a shadowy wolf-pack, the wailing death-song of a Cree woman vibrated the night air that was as still as though the tempest had put death upon the earth. It was Wolf Runner's squaw wailing because she thought him dead, and because Mas-ki-sis was not.

A dart of remorse shot through Cameron—he might have been the cause of that lament.

The Indian heard it, and, drawing himself up, his shrill voice pitched forward over the trail in the long "Hi-yi-yi-yi-i-i!" victory cry of the Crees. Then he drooped his shoulders low again, and, making wide the trail with his snow-shoes, struggled on in front of Wallace the hound.

For answer a slit of bright light cut the dark-

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ness as the flap of a tepee, which had lain hidden in the gloom, was thrown back and a head was thrust through. And presently, when Wolf Runner in the flesh stood before his Cree wife, and she knew it was not the spirit call, her stolid face was reached from its habitual ugliness into a face of joy that was almost beautiful.

Then Mas-ki-sis was lifted from the cariole by the mother arms, and held to a breast against which a heart thumped like a trip-hammer because of its fierce joy.

"Rest you in the tepee," said Malcolm to Bruce; "I'll sleep wi' the dogs, for they're in a bad way."

The minister understood the Scot's unexpressed objection to sleeping in his enemy's house, and he said: "Lad, think of what's ahead of you. Would you let the Church of Rome triumph—would you throw away a chance of winning Franchette? You could stand the cold, man, I know that, but you've had a hard time, an' the blast may be even now in your lungs. It won't do—it willna do," continued the Bruce, intensity of feeling carrying him to his broader mother-tongue. "You've conquered over the heathen with kindness more than if you had slain him; his heart now is that sore, he doesn't know what to do to make up for it. Perhaps he'll even think you're afraid, man," he suggested, with

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deep cunning, thinking to lash his comrade into good sense by an appeal to his vanity.

"I'm not that," declared Malcolm.

In the end the minister prevailed.

Cameron slept like a tired animal beside the Bruce, their feet to the fire, and their bodies warmed by the hot rabbit pot-soup that the squaw of Wolf Runner had prepared with eager hands. And in her heart was a song of gratitude that crooned softly from her lips.

For an hour the Indian sat, chin to knee, staring at the white men who had saved him, and nursing the fire with little faggots that it died not nor grew too hot. Then he slept as he crouched, little dog-naps, waking every hour to replenish the camp-fire. At last he opened the tepee flap and looked into the sky where the dipper swung around the North Star and marked off the flitting hours for the red man. Then he touched Bruce lightly on the shoulder, and, as the latter opened his eyes, held up five fingers. They had slept five hours, and Wolf Runner would have them start. There was another pot of generous rabbit-stew for their going.

As they made ready for the start, the Indian was packing in his blanket dried moose-meat and a brick of pemmican, as though he, too, was for a journey. Even as they tied their snow-shoes, Wolf

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Runner tied his; and when the dogs were harnessed, he made to take his place in their lead.

"Where's he going?" asked Malcolm roughly of Bruce.

"He faces the trail to Fort Donald," replied the minister.

"Drive him back, you," cried Malcolm; "my hands still itch to be at his throat."

The Bruce called Wolf Runner, and as the Indian came back he said in Cree: "Sit you here in your tepee; O Indian; we know the trail."

Then the Indian spoke.

"When Wolf Runner was coming back from the chase of Mooswa, and Wie-sah-ke-chack, who lives there where the cold light is"—he pointed with upraised hand to where the Northern Lights were flashing fantastic scrolls of ghost light far toward the pole—"when Wie-sah-ke-chack had breathed upon Wolf Runner and Mas-ki-sis the death-wind, did not your camp-fire beckon? And even as my strength went out, did not this man for whom I had done evil come and take me into the warmth? Would Mi-yah-tis, who sits in Wolf Runner's tepee, be not now singing the death-song but for the paleface? Do you not trail against Joe the Carcajou, and is not the trail deep, and are not the dogs tired, and will not your strength go out in making the trail? Even before

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you come to the Company's fort the dogs will fail—then Wolf Runner will become a dog—Wolf Runner will draw the sled even as a dog."

The Indian, man of silence, had spoken at great length, and in his voice was truth.

Bruce spoke not, but pointing to their way, nodded to Wolf Runner.

And once again the three men took up the trail for Fort Donald.

CHAPTER V

SOMETIMES Malcolm took the lead from Wolf Runner. When Bruce made to go forward Cameron would always stop him, saying: "Stay you behind, Minister. I'm thinkin' you'll have to run for it at the last. We'll just go as far as we can, an' then it's you to make good for the Kirk."

That day, and for two more, through poplar bluff and jack-pine and spruce and open prairie they fought the long length of the tortuous winding trail, with its depth of crustless snow that half engulfed the dogs. Silently, wearied beyond speech, they pressed forward hour after hour. The third night they travelled late, hoping to reach a small shack that stood where their own trail forked from the way to Metis Mission, twenty miles from Fort Donald; but it was beyond their endurance. An hour short of its shelter man and dog were done, and they camped in the pines.

In the morning, wearily plodding, they came to the shack at daybreak.

A fresh-cut trough in the snow showed where the plump weight of the little priest had left a mark of derision for them.

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Malcolm stood like a man petrified. "Minister!" he ejaculated, "there goes the trail of the ungodly Romans!"

His voice stopped the dogs, and they crouched in the snow, shivering with fatigue. Wolf Runner darted into the shack, raked the fire-ashes, and in a second was out again. The Indian pointed to the second joint of his forefinger.

"They are gone half an hour," said Bruce. "Come, lad, perk up, we'll do them yet."

Already Wolf Runner was tugging at the hounds.

"Up, Wallace! up, me bucks!" cried Malcolm, and the three pressed forward again.

As they travelled, the Indian pointed at the heart-shaped snow-shoe track that was always ahead of them.

"Somebody breaks the trail for Descoigne's dogs," commented Malcolm.

"And they all break the trail for us," said the minister, in a cheering voice. "We'll beat them out, lad."

In less than a mile one of the dogs keeled over in his harness and lay in the snow, done to death with the strain of storm and travel.

Without a word Wolf Runner slipped Wallace back into the collar he had stripped from the fallen

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hound, and, putting the leader's harness on his own shoulder, strode on.

The two Scotchmen looked into each other's eyes, and each saw something besides weariness.

Two hours, and still no sight of Joseph and the little priest. As they topped a hill, and it was a steep climb, another dog fell, and lay with his tongue blue and froth-covered on the snow.

The Bruce jumped forward, but Malcolm was before him. "Stay you back, Minister! You'll be needing your shanks for the wee bit at the end perhaps."

The fallen dog was loosed, and then, almost touching each other, harnessed together like train-dogs, the Indian and the Scot gave lead to the hounds.

Presently Wolf Runner held aloft his left hand with the thumb at the first joint of the forefinger.

"We're gaining, lad," cried Bruce. "He says they're but a quarter of an hour ahead. Hurrah for the Kirk!"

"They must have fresh huskies," panted Malcolm. "They run straight; there's never a mark in the snow of their sitting."

The Indian seemed a man of iron, tireless, all-silent; even the lover was not more eager in his travel—even the Church not more constant in its desire.

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At a cross-trail Malcolm cried out in bitterness. "Six miles to the fort, and we're not caught up yet. I'm afraid, man, I'm afraid."

"Ay, lad! what's that?" cried Bruce, eagerly, the next instant, pointing to a hill less than half a mile ahead.

"Hurrah! it's—it is, it is, it's the priest," cried Cameron, exultantly; and the eager push of his broad chest as he dashed forward in his joy threw the tired hounds on their heads in the snow.

"Better let the train go," said Bruce, "and to our shanks for it."

"No," objected Malcolm, "we travel as fast this way. But do you throw the blankets and all from the sled, and bide on it yourself, and rest a bit for the grand run when we've sighted the old fort."

"I'm not needing it," objected the Bruce; "I'm fresh, man, I'm fresh."

The priestly party sighted them, and the race became a race indeed. Joseph's dogs, fresher, evened up the determination of the Scots.

At Fort Donald that time, as it had been for three days, Captain Ball sat at a lookout window in the fort, marine-glass in hand, watching the trail that wound to Buffalo Neck. Many times he had focussed where it dipped over a hill a mile

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away, but this time it was just as Descoigne and the little priest reached the summit.

The captain jumped to his feet with a cry. As he looked, suddenly he gave a groan of dismay; it was the Catholic outfit. What! there was another speck of dark on the white snow now.

"Hivins! it's Malcolm—losin' be a hundred yards!" Ball wailed as he fairly rolled down the stairs. His wild war-cry brought Sandy and Gourelot and everybody else that was not dead to the fort square.

The place was alive, and so was Captain Ball—very much. While the others swarmed as bees that were drunk on new honey, his quick wit carried him into a nimble plan.

"Lomond! Lomond!" he called, to a gaunt hound that trailed at Sandy's heels, and whistled the shrill note that Cameron used for his dogs. "They're dead beat," he whispered to Sandy, as he jerked the leather belt from his waist; then, fastening it in the collar of Lomond, he fled down the trail with wondrous speed.

Sandy, understanding, held the others in garrulous talk, for they had not seen what Ball had seen through the long-reaching eye of his glass.

Descoigne was still in the lead, his dogs running strong and fresh, for they were now on a beaten trail.

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Ball knew not of Wolf Runner. He had an idea that the strong, fresh hound slipped quick into the train of Malcolm might turn the tide. Perhaps even Malcolm and the minister were too fagged to run a yard.

It was less than half a mile down the trail that he met the French party. As he turned out to pass, Joseph, in vindictiveness, struck at the hound with his heavy dog-whip. In an instant Lomond was upon him in retaliation.

The wolf-like huskies, roused by the hound's rush, tumbled over each other in an attack on the strange dog. Not even the huskies would have saved Descoigne from the other's fangs if Ball had not thrown himself upon the dog.

The melee of husky and hound and Frenchman were still an entanglement when Malcolm and Bruce came to its troubled edge.

"It's the favor of God!" cried Malcolm; "run for it, man! run for it, Minister!"

Bruce stripped with eager fingers the snowshoes from his moccasined feet, and with long stride carried the influence of the Kirk into Fort Donald.

With a cry of dismay the little priest rolled from his sled, and essayed to follow, but his short-fat legs were no match for the long shanks of the Hielander.

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The populace swarmed down the trail as the trains came into view, and Sandy, his office of detention gone, was of their number.

At sight of the minister he yelled: "The Bruce! the Bruce! Glory to God! Come awa', mon, to the Gourelot household."

Into the factor's presence the two Hielanders thrust themselves, and the Kirk had won beyond doubt.

CHAPTER VI

FACTOR GOURELOT had a philosophy, suave, debonair; it was like the mercury in a barometer which drives the indicator up in the midst of a fierce storm. So he beamed cheerfully upon Bruce, the winner, who was a Protestant.

"M'sieu le Curé, I complement you. I haf lost, you haf won; I am sad, see?" and his jocund countenance beamed a falsification to his statement.

"Mon, ye're a good loser, Factor," declared Sandy Cameron, admiringly.

"Mon Dieu! Is not Mamselle Franchette made happy?" questioned Gourelot, deprecatingly.

Their compliments were cut short by turmoil at the door. The little priest, Malcolm, Wolf Runner, Descoigne—everybody, even the dogs, had come—a vociferous throng, like the advance guard of a rabble corps. Factor Gourelot darted forward.

"Père Lemoine! Enter, good Father—welcome!"

"O Monsieur Gourelot, I am too fat," puffed

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the little priest. "I am a duck; I am le gros bear at berry-time."

"Come, come, Descoigne," cried Gourelot, eagerly, "you haf mak' un gran' race. Perhaps ze good father haf not beseech ze Church strong enough."

Descoigne was sullen, still smarting from his defeat—even the rake of Lomond's teeth in his shoulder.

"It was le chien du diable that lose us ever't'ing."

"Nevair mīnd, nevair mind," expostulated Gourelot. "M'sieu, Sandy haf beaten Factor Gourelot—ha, ha, ha! In Fort Donald we will nevair hear ze end of it. Come, Malcolm, stan' here; nōw we will see. Pardon me, Mes-sieurs——"

Gourelot darted to an inner room, and returned almost at once with Franchette on his arm.

Ah, it was good to see how blood would tell, how breeding would out. The factor's rotund figure took on inches of courtly stature as he placed the shrinking girl's hand in the big palm of Sandy's Malcolm.

"There, M'sieus," Gourelot cried, "ze race is finish; ze dog, ze storm, ze long leg of M'sieu Bruce haf not won; it is ze will of God. What say you, M'sieu le Curé?"

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"Factor, I can't spik in judgment on the will of God; but as you say true, M'sieu Gourelot, you have been unfortunate, the struggle has been gained by M'sieu Cameron, and we must be all good friends."

The little priest tapped Franchette playfully on the cheek and cried: "Mamselle is the happy little rebel." Then he shrugged his round shoulders till the big black cross with the brass figure of Christ clinging to it twisted fantastically, as though the priest's admixture of Jesuitical reluctance to credit the Protestant Church with a victory ordained of heaven and his playful humor of admonishment vibrated it unapprovingly.

"I won tin skins, Malcolm, me b'y," an Irish voice shot into the more or less church atmosphere. "Felix Benoit, ye'll just fork over."

"I not pay, me, Captain," declared Felix. "You set ze big dog for grab Joe, cause you bet ten skins."

Descoigne glared at Ball, but the Irishman laughed good-humoredly.

"Factor, jus' cut ould man Benoit tin' skins. It's mesilf'll take it in tobacco."

"Come awa', Meenister," said Sandy; "I'm thinkin' ye're fair beat wi' the long run."

Malcolm spoke up. "When—" he stopped, and shifted from one big foot to the other as

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though his moccasins had suddenly become sheets of fire. Franchette drooped her head until the mass of black hair fell about her face like a veil, hiding the eyes that were full of a wondrous light of joy and happiness and thanks to the Virgin Mother that had brought back to her safely the man she had pictured as dead when the fierce storm raved at her in its blizzard fury.

"Pardon," cried Gourelot. "To-morrow, frien's, we will make ze wedding. What say you, M'sieu Sandy?"

"I'm vera pleased," responded Cameron; "I'm thinkin' affairs o' this sort shouldna be put off. We'll just hae a bit rest the meanwhile."

Then ensconced in big Sandy's hospitable shack, Bruce had to live over again every foot of the trail for the edification of Cameron. Many times Sandy laid down his pipe with such ejaculations as: "Clearly the will o' God;" "It must hae been fearsome cauld;" "Ye did well to mak' camp, mon—I was afeared. If ye hadna come the day, we were to start oot, lookin' for ye."

And Malcolm's mother, Jeanie, that was the wife of Sandy, many times touched her stalwart son with little taps of love pride; sometimes she caressed his forehead, and always: "My braw lad!

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ye deserve a gude wifie. Anyway, ye didna let the Papists o'ercome ye, ye braw lad."

And as for Wolf Runner, Sandy saw that he was quartered well, with unlimited food and tobacco.

CHAPTER VII

JOE DESCOIGNE, moody, resentful, jealous of his rival's happiness, determined to have one more vicious try at upsetting the nuptials.

That night he talked long and earnestly with Factor Gourelot; his argument of persuasion was that they, the party of true belief, would have won had not that barbarian of an Irishman, Captain Ball, rushed down the trail and deliberately set the hound on him and his huskies. In Joe's philosophy a lie was just as much to be used in controversy as any other expression.

Might he be called upon to curse his own birth if the devilish captain had not set the hound on him. Why should Franchette be married out of her own belief, out of the true Church, to raise up children—grandchildren of Père Gourelot they would be, too—to be predestined to hell. And by a trick, M'sieu Gourelot—a vile heretical trick.

Gourelot was of an unsuspecting mind; he had not questioned the matter when big Sandy bolted into his presence with the winner, Bruce; but put in the Machiavellian light of Descoigne's deduc-

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tion, "Sacré," it did seem hardly fair. He had stuck to his bargain, had attempted no trickery, and, as Descoigne said, it must have been Cameron who had put Ball up to the hound intervention; it was like the Hielandman's astuteness.

"Spik wit' Père Lemoine, M'sieu Gourelot," suggested Descoigne. "De little father he's not t'ink of dese t'ings." Also Joe's name was not to be mentioned—Descoigne stipulated, begged that.

Gourelot was, mercurial, quite French in his weathercock-like shiftings. Mon Dieu! why should he be outwitted by big Sandy?

He hastened to consult the little priest. Father Lemoine listened quite patiently; it was part of his stock-in-trade, patience. A man of religion who was not patient beyond all understanding made no headway with the erratic children of the forest.

Factor Gourelot was even more impetuous in his objection than Descoigne had been—more sincere; but Père Lemoine, smothering the temptation of a possible turning of the tables, answered quite simply—they were speaking in French—"M'sieu Factor, you cannot do this thing. I am a servant of the Church; I do all things to save those of unbelief. I am here to lay down my life, if necessary, for our loved Mother; and I weep to think that the children of Franchette are to be lost because of a false belief. But my Church

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could not prosper if we destroyed the faith men have in one another. The temptation to me is strong, and the responsibility less than it is with you, for I have not given my word as to anything; but you, M'sieu Factor, you have, and you must keep faith. Your great Company keeps faith with the Indians and it is strong; you are its servant, and if you break faith with M'sieu Cameron, everybody will say the Company tells lies."

The little priest sighed wearily; he was speaking not of his own liking, but for the honor of Factor Gourelot, who had come to him for advice.

"But the trick of Captain Ball," the factor objected.

"M'sieu the Captain is not M'sieu Cameron. Also there was no trick—I saw; it was Descoigne's fault."

So Factor Gourelot went away from the little priest, shouldering the load of the inevitable, and glad that the good father had solved the matter for him.

The priest watched Gourelot going, his chubby fingers caressing the metal Christ that rested in the lap of his cassock. The father had a poetic little fancy of his own that sustained him in many a crisis. When the crucified figure felt hot against his hand, burned his fingers, he knew that he had acted wrongly; when his course of action had been

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right, dictated of the Holy Mother, the image of the Son comforted his fingers, fevered of misgiving, with a cool response. It was a fanciful material embodiment of conscience. Now, as the factor faded from sight, he felt the crucifix sweet to his touch; there was no hot sting of reproach; just a calm, holy consolation.

The priest groaned inwardly when the ceremony was performed by Minister Bruce. According to his tenets, it was a meaningless observance. Outside the pale of the true Church, it could possibly have no recognition by the higher tribunal. A lamb from his flock had been lost—taken by the wolves of unbelief. It was not a narrow prejudice; it was not the anger of defeat; it was belief, and he sighed in compassion. But the priest was brave. In the hour of distress he had prayed for the others, who were humans; a compact had been made, and to object would breed dissension and trouble and enmity. Was it the will of God, he even questioned to himself in silence. And by such a little he had lost. It was a sore trial to Father Lemoine; surely there would be many children—of a certainty there would be, and all Protestants, all heretics. When had such a disaster come to his diocese? Indeed, he should do penance for his obesity that had caused the disaster. The barbaric physical fitness of the heretic

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minister had over-reached all his zeal, his plethora of good dogs, his perfection of theological acumen; it was like a triumph of matter over mind—a mind schooled and sustained by the true religion.

It must be said that Factor Gourelot had no such vibrant emotions. Even the union might tide over many little difficulties which arose because of the varied nationalities and divergent theology which existed in Fort Donald.

Big Sandy was not so optimistic. He had a talk with Malcolm after the ceremony.

"A lass may gang frae her mither and fayther to the arms o' her laddie, I ken that; but I'm tellin' ye, Malcolm—I'm sayin', the Church o' Rome is stronger nor ony parent. Ye mak' yer ain bed, lad, an' ye maun lie on it; but I'm thinkin' ye'd best keep a strong hand o'er Franchette, an' dinna let them run back an' forth too much. The Frenchies are fond o' blatherin', an' speerin' the ways o' a hoosehold. Gie them tae understan' ye're a Cameron, an' laird in yer ain castle."

From time to time the father had other sage bits of advice; but he might as well have talked to the crackling ice in the river, for Malcolm was most abominably in love, and the black eyes of Franchette were the only thing to be considered.

CHAPTER VIII

THE festivities of the week were of undoubted fervor.

Father Lemoine had journeyed away from Fort Donald. The breed who had broken the trail from Metis Mission for his dogs took them back, and Descoigne's dogs would be sent on to Fort Donald at the first chance.

Usually the advent of the little father, even his stay in the post, would have been most welcome to all; but under the peculiar circumstances, and sad to relate, there was no one so disinterested as to regret his going.

"I'm vera glad, Malcolm," Sandy said, "vera glad indeed. We'll hae a better chance, mon, tae wean the lassie a bit."

Factor Gourelot felt somehow a reproach in the priest's presence. The factor had been the unfortunate instrument of casting a defeat in the way of the Church.

As for the post dwellers, Catholic and all, they were possessed of a huge desire to become ex-

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hilarated with liquor of a questionable quality. Even then the spirit was working itself up to a fine state of excitement in a couple of well-corked kegs which lay hidden in the shack of Felix Benoit, the half-breed.

He was a distiller of high repute; for did he not take the hops and barley and brown sugar and in the course of time produce from his stout kegs a fermentation which lifted the roof from the head of its imbibers? In a square hole under the floor of his shack Benoit had the kegged essence of jubilation, and it had come to its utmost point of high pressure, to the narrowest margin separating it from spontaneous combustion.

With the mild blue eyes of the good father upon them, the dwellers who knew of this godless vintage were steeped in the throes of apprehensive terror.

The fat little priest would prove a metaphorical skeleton at the marriage-feast. No adherent of the Church could hope to become drunken with impunity. So, when Father Lemoine, tortured by the ever-present vision of defeat, decided that he must return at once to his own flock at St. Ambrose, a mighty shout of relief went up, figuratively. The solicitude of the people for his welfare quite touched the priest's heart. As if by magic everything was prepared for his departure; they tum-

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bled over each other in their eagerness to expedite his going. It was a rare exhibition of Church influence, of regard for his office, the pleased father thought; it was the devilish fire-water seething in the cellar of Benoit, the thirsty ones knew.

For Bruce, heretical expounder of false doctrines, the Romanists cared not a button; and even those of his own method of religion had perhaps only a sharp reprimand to fear. The minister could not make them do penance; neither could he excommunicate them.

In all the Northland there was no known reason for not getting hopelessly in the meshes of a generous "drunk" except a deplorable scarcity of liquor; it was the one touch of civilization obtainable outside of religion. Besides, it took so little to bowl over a breed or an Indian; their susceptibility to intoxication seemed to have been planned wisely in its commensurate affinity to the limited supply.

Factor Gourelot carried in the Hudson Bay stores what was known as "dark brandy." Giant powder was a dwaff compared with the expansive power of this liquid. There was also Jamaica rum, scarcely less opiate in its effect on humanity. The factor's supply was small, limited under the head of "medical comforts," but at Christmas time, and upon the occasion of his daughter's mar-

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riage, Gourelot felt that he was called upon to relax somewhat.

In extenuation, it may be said he knew nothing of the hilarious fermentation in the cellar of the illicit shack.

CHAPTER IX

THE first night after the wedding there was a dance in the Company's big log building, that was half workshop, half storehouse. The floor was cleared of obstructive merchandise and a continuous plank seat strung around the wall.

The squaws and half-breed women sat hip to hip, not unlike totem figures, backed against the four walls. A door had been detached from an outbuilding, and, resting on two barrels, it made a platform for the orchestra. A concertina and a fiddle, worked by strong-armed men in hard training, aggravated the dancers into fierce activity.

The dim light, mazed by gaudily draped figures, suggested orientalism; the asthmatic scream of the rasping bow, the wheezing pump of the concertina, the rhythmic pat of the moccasined feet suggested something entirely incomprehensible—at least it would have to a man of modern habit; but to the post dwellers, to the trailers of furred animals, it was elysium.

The mainstay of the revel was the Red River Jig. The ball had opened stately enough with a

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cotillon; but Felix Benoit, who added to his profession of blacksmith the lighter office of floor-master at all the Fort Donald assemblies, and who had undertaken to "call off" the cotillon, became hopelessly entangled in the middle of the set, and it had to be abandoned.

Captain Ball, somewhat of a diplomatic organizer, had engineered this preliminary offering to the Thespian god; he had rounded up Malcolm, Factor Gourelot, and Brown, the carpenter.

"Faith, the nichies is touchy," Ball said. "They're like kids; an' a breed is a nichie, too. If a white man sits an' eats them out of house and home they think he's a good fellow; but if ye stand thim off they sulk. So now, me bucks," he continued, addressing his recruits, "if we jist open the ball wit' a square dance they'll be as plased as a pig wit' a tin snoot, an' there'll be lashin's av fun."

They squared away bravely enough, for Felix, feeling a twitch of stage-fright, had primed himself with a big tin-cupful of his hop-encourager.

Suzé Roland, the fiddler, had tortured for ten minutes the strings of his thin-voiced instrument, working them up to the last point of breaking strain. With a final resining of the bow, he tapped the back of his fiddle, drew an unearthly screech from the discordant strings, and they were ready for the fray.

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"Honor ze par'ner!" commanded Benoit.

Suzé Roland was hard at it on the fiddle, not quite into the full swing of any particular melody.

Factor Gourelot's profound obeisance was a lesson to rude people; the captain's possessed of much heartiness.

"Balancè all!" cut in Benoit, and Captain Ball flung a double shuffle at his partner that started the dust in a cloud. Gourelot's fat legs moved to the rhythm of a minuet; he was really too corpulent for extreme grace, but his intentions were good. Malcolm delighted his lady, Madam Gourelot, with an excerpt from the Highland Fling.

The rhythm of the music was nebulous; it admitted of two-four, three-four, and common time; in fact, the question of "time" was one of individual interpretation.

"Swing ze par'ner!" and Franchette's little heels nearly clipped a button from the rotund form of her parent as energetic Captain Ball swished her around with vociferous vehemence.

The factor's companion of the dance was a half-breed girl of considerable avoirdupois, and the two rotated with proper decorum.

Malcolm, like most Hielandmen, was agile for his size, so Madam Gourelot remained the pivot of his circle. He spun around her.

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Suzé Roland had come into the tune he was striving for, "The De'il among the Tailors." It wasn't exactly the cadence for a stately cotillon, but somehow the proper tune had got mislaid in his mind, for he played by ear.

"A la main lef'!" yelled Benoit, thumping the floor with his right foot to the mad music of Roland's extraction. It was delightful—it was exhilarating.

In a corner, carried away by the many things, the hop-brew, and the swift fiddling, two half-breeds were dancing a break-down.

"Here, me colleen!" Ball had cried in an ecstasy of fun as Franchette made a dash for Malcolm; and as the four couples finally disentangled themselves from the sinuous twist of "à la main lef'" Benoit called: "Swing ze par'ner!"

Then he went to pieces. The twisting figures, the fierce wail of the angry fiddle, the bad beer—all these things took hold of him, and if it had been to save his life he could have remembered nothing but "a la main lef'."

Once more the men cut away as the sun circles, and when they were straightened out Felix was ready with another, "Swing ze par'ner!"

It wasn't in human nature to stand it. A dance, and at Christmas time, should have some sort of

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variety, but "a la main lef'" and "swing ze par'ner." leads to nowhere.

Felix was groping for the next change—it wouldn't come.

It was Suzé Roland who really broke up the set; twice he had run through "The De'il among the Tailors," and the dancers had accomplished nothing, so to speak.

"Go on, go on!" cried Captain Ball.

Suzé rose in his wrath. "What I shall play me? Zat is not cotillon—it is ze prairie chicken dance."

"By Goss!" answered Felix, "what I'll can call cotillon to zat jig? I nevair hear such pig-squeak for make cotillon."

Ball interposed. "Faith, never moind; never moind! I'm pumped meself. What say ye, Factor? Let the b'ys have a Red River Jig. Go on, Suzé, play a jig. Slip yer cable, Benoit, the crew's mutineed."

When the fragments of the cotillon had been brushed from the floor, so to speak, the fiddler slipped into a palpitating Red River Jig; a breed darted at the many-colored human hedge that lined the wall, made a gesture with his hands in front of a demure squaw, and, turning his back on her, slouched to the centre of the room. Passing her shawl to a neighbor, the squaw followed. Then

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the jig took possession of the two dervishes, and double-shuffle, knock heel, and the whole gamut of jig steps were hammered into the floor.

Soon another breed cut out the first dancer; then another squaw relieved the sister who still toiled; and so on for hours, and hours.

The factor, madam, and Franchette left the ball early.

The café was the little blacksmith shop of Felix Benoit's, close by; and the wine was the union of hops and sugar and the bacillus of intoxication that Benoit had brought in a tin pail. This brew had been fortified, increased in its malignity, by a bottle of dark brandy and several vials of Jamaica ginger. It might be thought that this was a drink newly invented; but it was of old-time habit in Fort Donald, and the dancers toyed with it as a babe returns to warm milk.

They were equally tireless in the matter of dancing; and the morning light, stealing in through one small window, fell upon a grotesque human mosaic, blue and red and green and drab buckskin that covered the floor; for, as the end drew near, everyone took part indiscriminately in the dance.

Sometimes Suzé Roland slept as he fiddled, but it made little difference; the dance was really the thing.

CHAPTER X

THE day claimed fresh diversion: a shooting-match, wrestling, snow-shoe running, and racing with the trains of dogs.

Captain Ball, always original, unearthed a phase of sport he confidentially assured Malcolm would provide them with fun for a year. It was no less than a conspiracy to set Suzé Roland and Felix Benoit at each other.

He knew that the vendetta would lead to nothing beyond a war of words, many ~~boastings~~, and dire threats.

The mischievous Irishman approached Benoit first.

"Felix," he said, "Suzé swears be the powers that ye bust the dance."

Benoit blew out his breast in anger. "If Suzé say zat, I will smash him. By Gar! He's ole fiddle squeak, squeak, squeak. By Goss! What you zink, Captain—jig for cotillon. Huh!"

Then Ball interviewed Roland the musician.

"Suzé, Benoit is blowin' all over the fort that ye were drunk las' night, and spiled the dance for the factor."

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Suzé had a suspicion that Benoit would throw the blame upon him; now he knew it.

"Felix is one link," Suzé declared; "he's drunk, an' can't call nothings."

"Ye're right, Suzé. Faith, he swears he could take better music from the back of a cat than ye give the factor las' night."

Roland jumped in the air in a rage. "By Gar! I will mak' music from he's nose—I will mak' him sing. Sacré! Tuh!" and the fiddler spat into an imaginary face.

Then the genial captain sought once more Felix Benoit, and rendered unto him an unabridged version of Roland's vicarious compliments.

"Zee cat! zee gopher!" Benoit likened Suzé to all the despised animals of creation. He was even more despicable than the white-striped skunk.

"Ye must shut his mouth," declared Ball. "He'll be comin' to yer shack fer a pull at the beer, an' just t'row him out. If ye stan' up loike the man that ye are he'll run fer his loife—Suzé's afeared of ye, Felix; he knows ye're a holy terror at foighten."

The half-breed expanded his chest, and in his eye was a martial fire.

"M'sieu Captain, will you do Felix ze honor of accepting a drink? Ho, Boy!" he continued,

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in salutation, lifting his tin cup in undying friendship unto the man who had classed him a great fighter.

The captain's next move was encouragement for the leader of the orchestra.

"Suzé, that cat of a Frenchman, Felix——"

"Frenchman!" ejaculated Roland, in disgust; "he's not Frenchman, he is nichie—niggar; no, no, not French."

"Well, anyway, Roland, he says if ye stroike his shack to-day he'll t'row ye out. But, Suzé, he's jist blowin'—he's afeared of his life of ye—I know that. Ye could lick him wit' one hand tied behind yer back; Felix knows it, too. Don't stand his blather, or they'll all laugh at ye—they'll call ye 'squaw man.' Jist go up bowld as a lion, an' he'll crawl under the bed."

"Captaine, you shall see how I wipe ze floor wit' Felix ze link. By Gar! Feel dat, M'sieu Captaine," and Suzé stiffened his right arm while the Irishman pinched the muscles of it.

"I'll put the fear of God in him, Suzé," whispered Ball, confidently; "I'll tell him ye have an arm on ye loike a bear—an' ye have. The Lord pity Felix if ye swipe him wanst. But, Suzé, ye best ate no dinner—jest starve yersilf, an' ye'll have him. Divil a bit good is a man wit' a full belly in a foight. And, Roland, me b'y, I'll fix

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things. I'll take up to Felix's lashin's of grub from the Company's store—caribou tongues, jam—faith, I know the very kind Felix loikes to guzzle—greengage—an' I'll take wan of thim tins of plum-puddin' that'll hold him down solid, for he'll ate the whole of it, an' it'll be loike lead in his belly. I'll load him up to the chin, me b'y; he won't last wan round—ye'll have him pumped before ye can say Jack Rob'son."

Roland squared himself dramatically, and made a pass at an imaginative Felix.

"Avast, ye lubber!" cried Ball, jumping back in pretended affright; "if ye wanst let sliver that left at him, an' ye get home, me b'y, Felix'll be down and out. But he won't stand up to ye, Suzé; he'll take to the woods when he sees ye comin'."

"I'll keel him," declared Roland, fiercely; "he spik I can't play ze fiddle. Sacré! A la main lef'—a la main lef', zat all he say. —Pood!"

"Come up after dinner, Suzé," said Ball. "Jist weigh anchor after grub-pile, an' come sailin' into the shack as if ye meant to ate him. I'll spin him a yarn about ye bein' fair crazy fer a foight; I'll rub a bit of shoe-black in me eye, an' swear ye hit me a swipe that knocked the breath out av me."

"I will come," declared Roland. "Au revoir,

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gallant Capitaine. I show Mister Link, le box, I give him ze lash. By Gar! I make music for him."

Suzé had worked himself up to a frenzy of courageous anger; he pranced up and down the room, chasing an imaginary Felix with left hooks, right swings, and short jabs. He looked all over a winner.

"Don't eat," begged the captain as he left. "But there'll be no foight; Felix'll take to the woods."

Then Ball hied him to the shack of Felix Benoit. It was like a hive, full of human bees that had come to sip of the honey that Felix had generated in his kegs. Casually enough, the mischievous Irishman told Benoit that Suzé was coming up to clean him out.

"Huh!" Felix only deigned a snarl.

"Prétend ye're afeared of him," suggested Ball, "jest to draw him on a bit; fer as soon as ye shake yer fist in his face he'll hit the trail fer home."

"If he come, Capitaine, I knock him t'rough ze window. By Gar! las' summer down to Gran' Rapide I lick t'ree men."

"Don't hit him hard," Felix," pleaded Ball, "jest toss him through the door."

Ball's promised feast for Felix was purely visionary; he actually shared Benoit's dinner, for it

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was a land of free eating, and all that was in the shack was always at the service of its visitors.

About two o'clock Roland was observed coming up the hill with two of his friends.

"Don't rush out at him, Felix," commanded Ball; "let him come in."

Benoit had turned white at sight of his enemy. He spat on his hands and walked fiercely up and down the floor. "Spik him go away, Capitaine; if he come in here I keel him—t'row him t'rough ze window."

There was a knock at the door. Ball jumped up and opened it.

"Ho, Suzé!" he cried, cheerily; "come in, B'y."

Roland and his two friends stepped through the door and stood against the wall. Felix was there; why had he not started for the woods? The captain couldn't have told him about that swipe in the eye.

Felix glared furtively at his adversary, and threw his shoulders back to show the breadth of his chest. Did the crazy fiddler actually mean to fight him?

"Have a drink, B'y," said Ball, passing the tin cup to the new arrivals.

Suzé clutched at the cup eagerly; the drink would brace him up—he was a bit nervous.



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One of Felix's friends started to whistle derisively the jig Suzé had played at the dance. A sickly smile hovered on the thin lips of Felix.

Sacrebleu! it was a sneer, Suzé thought.

"That was a foine cotillon last night," said Ball, for an oppressive silence, bar the whistle, hung over the room.

Everybody laughed — even Felix — everybody but Suzé.

"Non, non!" cried Roland, deprecatingly; "I make ze bad music—I hear 'tis all my fault. Some fell' is drunk, an' makes a damn fool, zen Suzé can' play ze fiddle."

Benoit flared hot. "Suzé Roland, you come here for make row. By Gar! you say I drunk? Who can make a cotillon to pig-squeak? Whee-whee-whee!" and Benoit squealed through his nose like a troubled porker.

"A la main lef', a la main lef'," yelled Suzé. "Sving!—dat's cotillon."

"By Gar, Suzé Roland!" screamed Felix, shaking his fist in the air, "s'pose dis not my shack I wipe ze floor wit' you."

Ball had thrust his broad body between the two angry men. Thus encouraged, Suzé waxed wroth.

"I don' lick no man in hees own shack; but sacré! Felix, if I catch you some time on ze trail, I pound ze eart' wiz you."

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"Marse!" yelled Felix, "get out, I t'row you t'rough ze window."

The others had crowded about the two men, and the excitement was intense.

"Come outside!" yelled Roland, and he made for the door, feeling sure Felix would not dare to follow.

"Yes, yes!" everybody ejaculated; "outside, outside!" and the crowd streamed through the open doorway. Perhaps a fight would have matured out of all the recrimination—it is difficult to say; but at that instant there was a terrific crash—the plank floor heaved upward as though a volcano had suddenly been unchained; the boards were sent flying, and a something shot upward, carrying away the mud roof, and all but taking Felix with it. A shower of bad beer deluged everybody. One of the kegs in the little cellar beneath had exploded.

A stool, hurled with force, caught Suzé in the ribs; he thought Felix had treacherously shot him. He toppled over and rolled down the hill, yelling that he was shot; at the bottom he lay moaning, with his hand on his side, trying to hide from the vicious rifle of his treacherous enemy.

In fact, everybody was badly frightened, and ran in all directions; it appeared quite likely that

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Benoit's store of powder had blown up—everybody kept powder in the shack for the hunt.

In extenuation of Roland's peculiar retreat it may be said that even Ball, instigator of all the evil, took to his heels under the impression that a retribution had come to him for his mischief.

Felix was hurled through the door by the shock. His first thought—this even was some time in coming, for he was fair dazed—was that Roland had dropped a canister of powder in his stove to blow him up. Seeing the others in flight, he, too, ran for his life.

Luckily the women folks, feeling that they were in the way of so many men, had gone to a neighbor's, else there might have been an actual tragedy.

Ball, being stout, naturally ran down hill, in his eagerness almost falling over Suzé. Roland, who was lying as flat as possible in the snow.

"I'm keel!" squealed Suzé, as the captain was on the point of dashing into him. The voice checked the Irishman's mad career. "O Captaine, zat scoundrel have shot me in ze back. I t'ink me I sure die. Help me, Captaine, I can't get up."

"Shot nothin'!" roared Ball, as he looked back at the dismantled shack. "Felix's whole caboose is blowed up."

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"I'm not shot, Captaine?" queried Suzé, exultantly.

"No, ye silly lubber; what did ye run for?" Ball thought to hide his own retreat in recrimination.

Roland struggled to his feet, and looked at the huge hole in the roof of Benoit's log castle.

"What haf happen?" he queried.

"The devil a know do I," retorted Ball, shortly. "Sure I t'ought the whole world come to an end when the t'ing blowed up."

Suzé's courage came back when he found himself still alive and not likely to die.

"By Goss, Captaine," he said, "if ze shack haf not blow up, I haf lick Felix so he nevaire call no more dance."

"Let's go and see," said Ball. "P'r'aps some-one's kilt."

When they got back to the scene of disaster, Felix and the others had returned and were gazing at the explanation of the wreck.

Perched in the snow on the roof of a small incline rested the disrupted beer-keg. It leered at them from its spreading staves.

"Are ye hurted, Felix?" queried Ball, solicitously.

"No," answered the householder; "but ze roof is bust, an' ze beer——"

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"Hivins! it's all gone," said Ball; he hadn't appreciated the full extent of the calamity.

A moan went up from the others; they switched their sympathy from Felix over the roof to themselves over the beer. The building could be repaired, but it would take days to work up such a fierce fermentation again—besides, the hops were all gone.

In the general misery the feud between Felix and Suzé ~~break~~ into nothingness; it was a trifle. At such times internal strife could not be tolerated.

"Tell Felix ye're sorry for him, Suzé," commanded Ball. "Ye frightened the loife out of him, an' it's yer place to make up. Here, Felix," called the captain, "come and shake hands with Suzé. Two good men loike y'u should be foighten together, not foighten each other."

"By Goss!" said Benoit, coming forward, "we been frien's long teme. I forgot for call proper zat cotillon."

"Sacré!" interrupted Roland, "many times I play cotillon proper, but las' nigh' my old fiddle she jus' bound play jig all tem. I lick plenty fell' in my teme, Felix, but I don' want fight you."

"An' I don' want fight my old frien'," added Felix.

They clasped each other in their arms, and buried the hatchet.

CHAPTER XI

MALCOLM had not gone to see Ball's drawing of the two Frenchmen. Ordinarily he would have been of the party, but the intoxication he quaffed from the black eyes of Franchette gave him a distaste for the bad beer of Benoit's brewing. Besides, the Bruce was still with them, and had they not lain back to back in that cavern of death, the snow-mound of the blizzard?

Big Sandy and Factor Gourelot had hobnobbed together all day. Always full of considerable respect for each other, the present occasion was one to make soft the hearts of even more obdurate men.

In the factor's office-den, that boasted a huge iron box-stove, Gourelot and Cameron sat and smoked, and passed each other back and forth the dark brandy that was like the corked essence of Sheol.

In the first mellowness of its touch Sandy commiserated with Gourelot upon his defeat. He even suggested—it was after the third round—

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that perhaps it would be "na mair nor fair that half the children should be allowed to the Gourelot manner of faith." But the factor wouldn't have it.

"Mon Dieu! was not a bargain a bargain—did not the Company always keep its word, even if the loss were heavy?" And Gourelot had come from an ancestry that held their plighted word above everything.

The dark brandy was passed again at this point. Yes, Gourelot had continued, even if the children were predestined for eternal misery because of their Protestant belief, what mattered it? He, as a factor of the great Company and a French gentleman, had kept his word. Pooh! He threw out his chest and blinked at Sandy for approbation.

But Cameron was nettled at the other's reference to the ultimate fate of Malcolm's offsprings, *his* grandchildren; also, it was a Papist slight on his religion. Sandy grew very solemn. The brandy was coursing through his hot Scotch blood, and in that condition the big Highlander was usually very akin to a dangerous animal.

On the other hand, he was in the house of Franchette's father, and hospitality was almost as sacred as the religion he was ever ready to fight for. So he answered, taking a great pull at himself: "Weel, Factor, we'll jus' drap it. I'm think-

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in', whatever, we'll ken o' the future afore the bairns gang yon way. Ye'll be bidin' for yer ain kind, most like, an' I'll be seeing the Protestants comin' mesel'. An' I'm thinkin' I'd be pleased tae be wi' Malcolm's bairnies whichever way they hae tae go. So dinna pother about it, Factor; we'll jus' drink up a dochna doris, an' I'll awa' hame tae see hoo the lassie's takin' tae Jeanie."

Gourelot was for keeping Cameron longer, büt Sandy had an additional reason for wishing to cut out. The minister was stopping at his shack, and the fierce strength of the dark brandy was already playing funny tricks with his tongue—it was of an extraordinary thickness.

Even the walk home did not better matters, and the sharp eye of Bruce saw with regret that Cameron was well in the grasp of the demon.

Perhaps even Jeanie, wife to big Sandy, may have whispered the minister to speak a word to her husband about the drink.

CHAPTER XII

ROSS BRUCE, however, upbraided no man. He had observed with pain the muddled condition of the post dwellers. He knew that liquor was the one accursed thing carried in the van of that western civilization; where the white man went, liquor went. To the breed and the Indian, it was absolute poison; a poison with the fatal fascination of the loco plant.

The law, strict as it was, must depend for execution upon those in authority; therefore he held Factor Gourelot and big Sandy, who was a leader, morally responsible for the drunken condition of Fort Donald.

With this matter in his heart he prayed for light—how best he could counteract the evil influence. And it came to him that, when he took the functions of his priestly office on the Sabbath, which was the next day, he could speak with authority. Cameron's respect for the house of God would cause him to listen with a contrite heart.

The Bruce, as minister of God, was there to

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assail sin; and the sin, rampant in all its hideous evidence, was drink, with its fierce power over the morally paralyzed breeds and Indians.

The Scotch minister was far too broad-minded to lend his splendid powers to any fanatical narrowness. Even in the priesthood there are many degrees of variation, extending from wise tolerance to intolerant reasoning.

So far as Bruce's office was concerned, nothing in all the great land, nothing affecting its noble race of men, was of such vital importance as the soul-and-body-destroying liquor. The magnitude of his task appealed to him, urged him to effort; but its seeming hopelessness sickened his soul. It was a contest between the Bible and the bottle; the saving or destruction of a race. Religion, the mission of God, had narrowed itself down to that.

And the bottle had acquired such a tremendous lead. For all time the white man had used it to overcome the red.

The Company had steeped a generation of Indians in strong spirits, till they were as lotus-eaters. Then the white man had made a law prohibiting liquor, and others of the white race broke it in many places and at all times.

Where Bruce stood, Bible in hand, seeking for regeneration, half a thousand of his own kind ran with swift feet carrying the extract of destruction.

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Surely the Master's word had few lieutenants, where the army of the Evil One was so strong. He was the keeper of his brother; but the land was strident with the voices of those disclaiming responsibility.

There was no regular kirk, no church building at Fort Donald; the people assembled in the Company's warehouse. There were even few chairs to be had from the rude shacks; bales of fur and boxes of merchandise were arranged in rows, and on these the dwellers sat and listened to a sermon of simple eloquence.

Protestants and Catholics alike were there. Captain Ball advised Suzé Roland to bring Felix Benoit, who was a Romanist.

"The minister is angry wit' ye, Suzé," he said. "He's heered of the rumpus, an' the busted beer-keg; so go, loike a good little man, an' bring Benoit; come arm in arm if ye loike, jes' to show there's no grudge."

So, true enough, the two warlike ones sat meekly, shoulder to shoulder, on a bale of bearskin-covered beaver pelts.

Sandy and his good wife Jeanie, Malcolm and Franchette, Factor Gourelot and Madam, were in the front row, which was made up of chairs and three-legged stools. The squaws brought their children, even to the babes in arms.

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The pulpit was a most original conception. The huge beam had been taken out of the fur-press, the posts draped with red cloth, and, though it looked somewhat like an auctioneer's box, it was altogether most serviceable.

Just at the opening hymn Wolf Runner slipped furtively through the door and sat meekly in a far corner. Like many of the Indians present he would not understand the English sermon; but the ogama who had pulled him and little Maski-sis from the cold death and warmed them back to life was to speak, was to hold forth as a medicine-man.

Once upon a time Ross Bruce had sat in mental torture—it was at Saskatchewan Landing—while a most worthy bishop of his Church rendered unto the small congregation of fur-trapping breeds a scholarly sermon on the beautiful life of St. Paul. The bishop was an Oxford man, and, for the matter of that, the sermon was ethically an Oxford sermon. The effect was pretty much the same as might have been produced by a French half-breed giving his ideas of the higher life before the faculty of that university. It was a distinct folly. Bruce knew that. He would not make that mistake; but, at the same time, he was haunted by the not-to-be-eradicated fear that his own efforts, no matter how simply directed—his

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logic, clothed in the most commonplace terms, might prove as barren of results, as useless as the folly of the bishop. It was a heart-breaking conviction, the belief that in these children of the plain and forest was not left enough moral force to stand against their physical desires.

But to burke the disagreeable truth—close his eyes to actual conditions, and expect to regenerate in one day by a Christian appeal to their moral natures a people debased by a century of godless debauchery, would be a folly as great as the bishop's misdirected effort. His course was plainly to form a coalition—to lessen the opposition of the suicides by showing them their inevitable fate, and to impress the powers, Sandy and the factor, with the tremendous responsibility God had put upon them when He had made them of the house of Shem.

Sandy Cameron groaned inwardly when the minister, standing in the fur-press that was a pulpit, read the text:

"Noah began to be an husbandman. And he planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine and was drunken."

Had Bruce not uttered another word Sandy Cameron would have gone home abashed. Was not he Noah—was not he a patriarch there among these children of little understanding? Bruce had

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not reproached him, and he had hoped for a silent reprieve.

Very quietly, as a man handles delicate china, the minister explained with simpleness that Noah fell through ignorance. The wine seemed good to him, and he drank of it beyond reason. Then he had the saving grace of shame and anger against Ham who had looked upon this evil with levity.

The red men had been like Noah in their ignorance. God had favored them beyond all races, for liquor was not of their glorious heritage of birthright.

When, to their eternal shame, the white men had brought the fire-water, the Indians had taken it as did Noah; it warmed their hearts and made them joyous; and then it mastered them, and they lay like the Patriarch, naked in their misery.

In his drunkenness Noah must have quaffed the dregs of bitterness, and must have seen with prophetic eye how the bottle demon would go down through all ages, like a pestilential fiend, casting disgrace and sin through the nations. In his wrath he cursed his own son, Ham, because he looked with such toleration, such levity, upon this terrible blight.

The minister had lingered for a space in the distant ages; now in his discourse he came at once

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to the homes of his hearers. He pictured the curse of Ham as existing at that day in Fort Donald.

As to the ethical construction, born of learned wranglings, to be placed upon the picture of Noah's condition, he troubled not the simple listeners; his construction would, perhaps, by God's grace, give him a command of the two factions—the drinkers and their should-be guardians?

“‘Am I my brother's keeper?’ was the cowardly evasive question of a murderer,” the minister said, with solemn earnestness. “The man who denies a common brotherhood, with all its human obligation, and stands, like Peter, by the fire warming himself in the hour of trial, is a coward, and may be morally a murderer.”

Again Cameron writhed on his three-legged stool. Beads of perspiration glistened like dew-drops on the smooth brow of Factor Gourelot. Was not he, as factor, more than ever a keeper of these frail brothers who were so utterly within his influence? In the name of the good God, who had told M'sieu Bruce that he had been stripped of his moral raiment by the dark brandy?

The Scotch minister's shrewd eye saw the trepidation of the leaders, and it nerved him. He was almost Jesuitical in his striving for good that day. Behind the affected ones were many rows of dark faces which gave no light of hope, no responding

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look of humiliation or regret. When the actual wrath of the Church of Rome, which was always a weapon in the hands of the priests, had done so little to keep these morally indifferent ones from alcoholic sin, what could his simple rhetoric achieve? Even between the Bruce's strongest arguments of denunciation these thoughts stalked in his mind like a cry of despair. The rebellion evident in the swarthy faces could be spelled, "Mene, Mene; Tekel, Upharsin."

And it was because of his own people, the whites. He could have stood there in the fur-press and cursed, like Noah, his own for this wronging of a race.

It was all in rebellion to God's law; the union of the two races, white and red, was contrary to his law. And there in front of the minister, in serried rank, sat the embodiment of this ungodly union, moral weaklings. Still he must go on; and to reach them, the Indians, even stretch a theological point—talk to them of their own God, of Manitou. He bade them, if they would not come to his God, to be true to their own.

"Manitou taught you no evil," he said. "He showed you not the drink demon. Your sin was bloodshed; the same sin of refusing the animating spirit of love—love for your fellow-creatures. When you made war, you prayed to Manitou for

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success, and if you won the battle you thought he was pleased with you, had given you the favor of his support. That was a sin and a lie against your God, for his wrath because of the bloodshed always came back to you; your songs of victory were changed to the crying of your women at night for the braves that were not.

"And when you put the fire-water into the hands of your brothers, they are slain, and it is a sin against your God and my God. There is heard only in the tent of your people the wail of your women at night and the crying of your children, for the braves of your tribe are dishonored and dead. My people have put this accursed poison in your hands, and you have looked upon these foes as friends. And I ask you, if God-fearing men of my race seek to save you from this death, look upon them as true friends, and not in enmity."

Bruce spoke of fire to the dwellers. How carefully they guarded their camp-fire when on the summer trail, lest it spread and sweep to destruction the grass-covered prairie with its buffalo and antelope, and the forest, wherein were the beaver and otter. Then he pictured, with the graphic word-painting of a Cree orator, the fire-swept hillside that backed Fort Donald. On its breast were the skeleton forms of trees, some black, some white, at whose roots the fire had licked with burn-

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ing tongue. The liquor was a fire, a forest fire, burning the roots of their existence and scorching their souls till they shrivelled up and became like the barkless trees, tombstones to wrecked lives.

The minister sought to draw the different interests a little closer together. For a day he would be in Fort Donald, then for many days the dwellers would be their own spiritual guides. He said: "There is only one sermon to preach all the world over, to be preached of all creeds and of all peoples. It is the message of your little priest, you that have that faith; it is the sustaining influence of humanity and God, the animating spirit of love. Without it nothing avails. When your mothers scarify their limbs with sharp flints it is because they have lost someone they love; when your Indians find a white man lost and starving, and you feed him, it is because of human love. Of love comes happiness; and of hate, misery. Drink is the black wampum—its message is war and destruction; the word of God is the white wampum, and its message is love. Let those in authority, the ogamas, keep this fire-water out of your camps because of love, and you who are our brothers be not angry if, because of love for you, they do this."

The minister talked still further in his efforts to make the dwellers see that those who poisoned them to death were enemies as great as those who

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sought their lives with the knife. Possessed of his great love for humanity, and grave in his earnestness, Bruce silenced the voice that cried out within him, "Mene, mene," and craved of God for the power of the pool of Siloam for these people who were tainted of alcohol.

And at the end this thing happened which was like a fanatical appeal from a narrow-minded enthusiast; it wasn't that at all, it was the wise plea of a great-minded man.

"You must not have the accursed fire-water amongst you at all. Leave it to them who can take it safely—if there are any such. You know that the food of one animal is not the food of another; the buffalo could not wax fat on the poplar-bark of the beaver, nor the bear come to his strength on the short dry grass that is good to the buffalo. To you the fire-water is as the loco plant—once tasted it claims its victims to death. In Fort Donald every man, factor and trapper, must see to it that not one drop of this poison is obtainable. In God's pleasure you will thrive, and in God's anger you will achieve to the curse that follows drunkenness. And in the end I crave for you the animating spirit of God's love and human love. 'Love ye one another.'"

CHAPTER XIII

THE faces that had been masks, heavy in vacuity, repellent in their stoical complacency, came out of their torpor in the sunlight.

Ordinarily a sermon was simply part of an observance. The people being possessed of a fatuous fancy that somehow, subconsciously as it were, the discourse, even though not listened to, purified them somewhat of their many sins; and that, having sat there in the house of God, their punishment would be most certainly mitigated. But this day the minister had talked on a subject that interested them at all times—drink. Outside of “grub,” or furs, it was the paramount thing in their lives.

The Bruce's sermon, in English, had many interpreters rendering it into Cree for those who had not understood. It must be said that some of the versions were wondrous and unabridged. Might the minister have listened to the rendering of his oratory he would have been astonished, perhaps scandalized. According to some accounts he had accused the Cameron of emulating Noah literally in his cups.

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The vagaries of the sermon's effect were beyond all calculation. Somehow, taken all in all, this religion of the Protestant ministers, which the Catholics considered no religion at all, was actually more exacting, harsher in its commands, than the true belief. Their little excess—and already they felt as well as ever again—was to debar them for ever and ever from the pleasures of a good time.

The Catholics most certainly had the better of the argument. When the little father came again to Fort Donald the inebriates might confess—that is, if the factor, who was a good Catholic, deemed it necessary—and be forgiven. The minister, who was not their spiritual leader, had better go and scold his own people at Buffalo Neck.

"Poof!" one said, as a group of them journeyed along, "ze good book spik of gran' wine—many time it spik. For Fort Donald is only water, or we nevair see le bon Dieu."

"I t'ink me I have read plenty time in ze book 'bout dat wine," declared Lerocq; "it spik de Seigneur always put a new wine in good strong bottles, not trus' de ole bottle, for he's goin' bus'."

"Felix don' know dat," said the first speaker, laughing. "Nex' time he mus' get de new keg, den we don' lose all de bully strong beer."

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There were many hours of discussion of the same tenor, showing that the reformer's trail ran through a thorn-thicket of indifferent sinfulness; thorns that tore to pieces and rent a simple logic of love and faith with their silly, useless points.

As Bruce left the church Sandy Cameron joined him, and they walked together.

"Ye did vera weel," Cameron said.

A big sigh smothered in Bruce's chest. He had tried, but to what success he had attained was troubling him much.

"Yon discoorse o' Noah's fall was strong," Sandy continued; "I'm thinkin'—weel, Meenister, there's na doot aboot it—I was just Noah; yes, it was a grand thocht. I ken it a'. If ye had talked tae me aboot bein' fu', I might hae rebelled, mon, one canna tell; one's dender is an uncertain, sinfu' thing."

Cameron walked a little in silence, for Bruce did not answer. Suddenly he put his big brawny hand on the minister's arm, and said, solemnly: "It'll be mony a lang day afore these'll look upon the nakedness o' Noah again, whatever."

Bruce held out his hand, and big Sandy clasped it in compact.

"You've taken a load off my mind, Cameron; I had a feelin' o' defeat. Last night I walked up and down the trail in prayer—just asking of God,

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as I walked, for grace to make a bit head against the rum."

"An' He gie it ye—the sermon was powerfu', it jus' gripped me."

"But the others—what of the poor creatures that are slaves to it, carryin' the curse o' Canaan—I could not see a spark of redemption—their faces were just full of rebellious accusation; they were holding the sin of our own whites against all my pleading."

Bruce spoke impetuously, his soul warring against the inevitable.

"I'll be away in a day," he continued; "you have no kirk, nor anyone to preach the word of God. The factor is a Catholic, and he won't take the service."

"Ye're meanin', Meenister, I might tak' it."

"It would do a power of good."

"An' ye're worritin' ower the drink?"

"I am."

"I'll do wi'oot it."

"It isn't yourself, Cameron; the others have no restraint whatever. I'm thinkin' if you'd put your foot down, man—you have the law on your side—and stop the brewin' of poison——"

"I will," declared Sandy.

As Bruce looked into the blue eyes of the Cameron his soul trembled with thankfulness. He had

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won a lieutenant that would wage strong war against the legions of the Devil. Surely he had won a wage by his efforts.

"May God give you strength, Cameron; you'll be sorely tried. Just preach to them of kindly love."

"And keep the drink frae them, Meenister," added the practical body.

"You'll be reviled, man," declared Bruce, questioningly.

"The breeds are gran' at that game. I'll hae a reputation for meanness an' meddlin' that would make Judas ashamed o' me."

"And you're willing to take up the load, Sandy?"

"Aye. A man couldna boast o' much love for his fellow humans an' he was afeared tae help them against the De'il."

"I'm satisfied," the minister said, simply.

As the spirit of love, of faith, of conviction leapt from cross to cross at the crucifixion until the thief cried: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom," so, from the crude furpress, sanctified, had passed the spirit of love until, that night, the huge Scot cried in an agony of abasement: "Lord, remember me to the helping of these poor humans."

CHAPTER XIV

FOR moons Fort Donald lapsed into ordinary life. The furs came in, and Factor Gourelot revelled in an atmosphere redolent of dog-bear and castoreum and smoke-tanned moose-skins that had the pungency of burning birch-bark.

The two religions lay down side by side and slumbered peacefully.

A neutrality of hate existed between Descoigne and Malcolm, it is true, but it also was as quiescent as something that is seemingly still because of fierce velocity.

The winter months slipped away smoothly—dying with great noise at the end, as the river ice-jam broke with the thunderous crash of a shattered glacier.

Then it was indeed spring. The sun, full of regret for the days of neglect, smiled in his eager return, and loitered through many hours of the twenty-four, fighting the darkness that chilled the yearning earth, and ever gaining upon the foe.

The maple, the ash, and the oak drank up from the brown earth a warmer heart's blood,

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and shook out a fairy canopy of shade in return.

Like kittens the anemones opened their bright little eyes and peeped at the great world so full of strange spring noises, of twittering birds and burrowing insects. Even the "deer-mice," long-eared and swift of foot, squeaked in joy as they skurried with velocity over the timid flowers. The wild cherry threw perfumed kisses from pale lips to the wind that was like one continuous chinook. Each night the stars peeping forth looked down upon a babe flower-brother, new born into raiment of white, or gold, or purple, or egg-blue; for the red men say that Manitou gave to their beautified prairies a flower for each journey of the sun over its sky trail. And, in vagary of fancy, they whisper that when children die and go to Manitou, carrying gifts of flowers, the seeds fall back to earth and bloom again.

Little gray shadows flitted through the woods, for the young of Wapoos the rabbit were everywhere.

And in the sedge-bordered lakes the mallard wove her nest of strong grass, and the loon called imperiously to all that winged in travel to stay in that land of sweet-feeding.

On high, from his harrow-shaped troop, the gray-goose answered the loon in mocking derision,

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"A-honk, a-honk, a-honk!" and slipped from sight in the hiding gray atmosphere.

And great revelry was on with the gallinaceous grouse, the gray-mottled prairie-chicken. Their sand-hill ballrooms that had been deserted for a year, now felt once more the pat of little feather-legged feet as they gathered in crowds and strutted and-crouked, and-spread their fine feathers, and danced. It was courtship; and for every lass there was a lover, and for every mated pair some beautiful cover of shrub thicket where their nest could be hidden away.

Breasting the swift waters of the many rivers that cut the land like a spider-web swam the gold-eyes — silver-white, and with the rare jewels through which they watched in dread for that huge-jawed cannibal, the ever-hungry jack-fish.

And some giant, possessed of an art eye, had stood on the brow of every hill and scattered to the winds trinkets of gold that were the yellow blossoms of the gray-leafed Silver Berry.

The prayers of Minister Bruce at Buffalo Neck for the dwellers of Fort Donald held reward through all the spring and early summer. No great evil had come to them, and the peace of occupation was upon them.

In September the fire that Bruce had pictured

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lapping at their souls took possession of the post with the insidious velocity of sunlight.

Like the unrest that comes to horses when their fine sensibility knows of an unseen danger was the telepathic knowledge possessed of all that liquor was at hand. Darkness had shielded its advent, and no tongue told of its coming nor of its sponsors. A gentle hilarity, like the smile of spring-time, pervaded the atmosphere.

Behind Fort Donald the upreaching hills of the Saskatchewan lay bathed in warm sunlight that picked out ruby lights from crimson-leaved maple, and splashed the sheen of gold from yellow and tawny oak; and below the trees were the coral beads of rosebuds, and saffron plume of golden-rod, and clusters of white, pearl-like berries drooping from slender stems of vermilion willows, softened by the silvered leaves of wolf-willow. The olive-leaved buffalo berry wore its autumn aigrette of blood-red jewelled fruit. Twined through the hills an emerald necklace of green spruce traced the sinuous creep of Otter Creek; and in the jade-like mantle of its valley were pencilled marble-white pillars of silken birch.

But in the manifest evidence of all this glory of God's creation Fort Donald was swift drifting into a vortex of hopeless inebriation. Louis Gou-

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relot had slipped a little way into the temptation, the others swam it.

Guardian Sandy, looking out upon the dwellers in the land of relapse, saw that the present instalment of fire-water was a thing of vast proportions—that meant whiskey smugglers; and they were an evil pestilence that brought worse than the most dread disease. So he schooled his inherent desire against the taint of spirits that was in the hazed September atmosphere, and stood a self-ordained constable of his fellow post dwellers.

The first day they were all of a vast brotherhood; the second, some fell asunder, and slept at fitful intervals; the third, a morose ferocity worked like acrid poison into the minds that were aflame of untempered alcohol.

The stern face of Cameron grew fierce in its hardness as he sat and wrote the record of man's folly on the air in letters of petulant smoke from a briar pipe.

When he spoke to Louis Gourelot, the Frenchman blew out his fat cheeks and wrinkled his brow in an attempt at gravity. Then he said, "Pooh!" and laughed in foolishness. Three tin cups of over-proof whiskey had a potency that Demosthenes could not have talked into subjection. Bruce's philosophy at Christmas-tide had slipped from the volatile Frenchman like snow from a

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mountain-side. For a time he had felt its wisdom; then the small voice became hushed; and now it was but one of the many buried resolves.

The big Scot's deep-set eyes rested on the round, fat face for an instant, and its vacuity lashed him into heroic effort.

"Factor Gourelot," he said, "do ye no' ken wha's put upon us by a' this deeviltry? There's ne'er a meenister here—there's no' a dhoctor—we hae no Mounted Police—no court; naething but jes' oorself's tae stand atwixt the honor o' Fort Donald an' the lowerin' o' its people tae beasts."

The rotund Frenchman blinked his eyes in bewilderment. Then he threw forth again the silly laugh. "M'sieu Sandy, you spik—you make ze gran' speech. I will stan' treat——"

"Mon!" exclaimed Cameron, "but ye no ken—ye no ken; Factor, yer a dahm fool! But I see it a'. It's for me tae put a stop tae a' this deeviltry. Ye're a magistrate, an' I'm the police force, constituted by the powers—the powers o' reason."

"Ver' gran', ver' gran'," commented Gourelot; "ze red wine have make' you spik, eh, Cameron?"

The anger that was in Sandy's solemn eyes vanished and a look of pity shone there as he turned his back upon the factor and passed up the one

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long road that skirted the river-bank. Half way to his own shack was Baptiste Lerocq.

Baptiste could walk—not consistently, with adhesion to a preconceived route, but still he could progress. This fact gave him confidence, and he offered to fight the Scotchman. In addition to his complement of whiskey he carried a knife-thrust in his shoulder that had been given him, out of sheer gratuity, by one of his fellow-revellers. Blood trickled from the wound down his buck-skin shirt, over the gaudy silk-worked flowers, and hid itself in shame in the dust of the road.

"Who gie ye that, mon?" asked Sandy, tapping the slashed shoulder with his finger.

Baptiste was irrelevant, truculent, eloquent in his debased vocabulary.

"Ye poor de'il!" continued the Scotchman, taking no notice of the insect. "Tell me, mon, where's the speerit—tell it me, mon," and he grasped the little Frenchman's shirt-collar, and, drawing him close up, peered deep down into the small red-brown eyes till the illogical Baptiste shrivelled up in his soul, and answered: "P'raps de boys is down wit' Felix Benoit."

Without answer, and still clasping Lerocq by the collar, Sandy strode on to his shack; there he washed and dressed the other's wound.

"Now awa' tae yer ain shack, mon!" he com-

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manded. "I'm tae Benoit's, mesel'; an' if ye come nigh the place I'll smash yer heid. Awa', noo—make haste!"

Taking an axe, Sandy started for the abode of Felix Benoit.

"It's the will o' God—it's the will o' God!" he kept repeating to himself as he swung along. "I canna help it—I canna help it; God's evidence I maun do it. The poor de'ils!"

"Bruce"—he felt the minister's spiritual presence—"I gied ma word tae stan' against the drink, an' I'll dae it—I'll dae it. I'm Noah in my wrath; forbye I'll no curse the poor de'ils, I'll save them."

Inside the shack a discordant fiddle was inciting, in jig time, the revellers to dance; exuberant cries smote the air through a window-sash fringed with broken glass.

"Ma God, what beasts!" moaned Sandy, as he put his hand to the latch and swung wide the creaking door.

On a rough table in the centre of the shack's one room was a keg. Frank, and Scot, and half-breed were there in many conditions of inebriation.

As Cameron stood in the doorway and gazed with fierce reproach upon the drinkers a hush smothered their clamor—even the fiddle stilled its reluctant squeak. Two men who had been step-

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ping maudlin time to its strains leaned against the log wall with its mud chinking and glared at the intruder.

"M'sieu Sandy," cried a Frenchman, "compliments. Come in, Boy, an' wet ze whistle."

"Wha's he glowerin' at?" snarled old Brown.

"I'll no' drink," declared Sandy, fiercely. "I'm no' sayin' that I wouldna tak' a drop in reason—whiskey in its place is good, mony a time I've been glad of it—but it wasna meant to mak' beasts o' men."

"Wha's a beast?" cried Brown, fiercely.

"Oh, lads, lads," pleaded Sandy, suddenly softening, "dinna ye ken ye're disgracin' the name o' mon. Would ye mak Fort Donald ashamed o' hersel'; will ye gang forward till there's murder done—hasna Lerocq been knifed? Will ye gie it up, an' tell me wha' de'il run it in, or will I hae tae smash the keg tae save ye all frae distruction?"

A roar of angry voices answered him.

"Father!"

Sandy started as though he had been struck. It was his son Malcolm's voice; the father had not seen the young Scot in the dim-lighted room.

"Ye're here, lad? Oh, ma God! a beast amang beasts!"

"Ye took it yerself, father, at the weddin'," retorted Malcolm.

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"Aye, lad, but I'm ashamed o' it noo. An' I'm sair troubled ~~over~~ this de'il's permit that's i' the post."

"I s'pose M'sieu Cameron t'inks we are all nichies, an' when he spik don' drink, we must stop. M'sieu Cameron is le gran' ogama."

It was Felix Benoit who thus derided Sandy; not with precision of language but with maudlin breaks.

In a corner, between the cooking-stove and the wall, crouched the Cree wife of Felix and her daughter Julie. The dumb ache of dread was in the eyes that had been schooled to subjection.

"An' afore the women, too," continued the Scot; "an' wi' nichies," indicating with his big brawny hand two Indian-like breeds.

A man staggered across the floor, picked a tin cup from the table, and filled it from the keg. Then he faced big Sandy, and, proffering the tankard, said, "Ho, Boy! Drink wit' Joe Descoigne—he's not nichie."

"Awa', mon; awa', mon!" answered Cameron.

"Drink, M'sieu," repeated Descoigne, and in his voice was the seductive glamor of a threat.

An animal unrest breathed in the stifling air of the reeking shack; it half-sobered those who held sway over their senses. All who were not asleep rose to their feet and stood deep breathing with

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the tenseness of expectant evil. One of the two men must back down, else the hazard would be a life.

"Will M'sieu drink?" once more the Frenchman asked, holding the tin cup close to Cameron's nose. The fumes of the spirit smote on Sandy's nostrils and maddened him. The sneering face of his tormentor was thrust close, and he longed to stretch out his hand and grip the other's throat. But was he not a self-constituted guardian of his fellow-men? Had he not come there to prevent bloodshed—was not his enmity against the liquor and the outlaws who had brought it?

"Joe Descoigne," he said, and it was gravity, not anger, in his deep voice, "dinna worry me. I willna drink, an' I ask ye tae help save the guid name o' Fort Donald. Mon, mon! it's sinfu'—it's degradin'. Listen tae reason, mon; spill the wicked thing 'bn the ground an' be men, not beasts."

Perhaps Descoigne might have wavered, but Felix Benoit, whose mind was impossible of anything but the lash, laughed mockingly, and piped with shrill vindictiveness, "Beasts—and nichies!"

"Sacré!" muttered Descoigne. "M'sieu Sandy, drink, or marse!"

At the insulting "marse" (a dog's order to go) Sandy's big frame quivered, and his gaunt eyes

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blazed with suppressed fury. If the debauch had not deadened Descoigne's senses, he would have hesitated ere he stung the huge Scot again; but he was a wasp, an adder, an instrument of evil, and in a fit of uncontrolled viciousness he dashed the whiskey across Cameron's face.

The tin cup had not clattered from his foolish fingers before the arms of Cameron had caught him in a grasp like the press of a python. His bones cracked; his ribs pressed upon his lungs; his throat closed, and darkness fell upon him. A knife that he had half drawn sank into his thigh as the fierce muscles of the great Scot compressed him from every side.

Noises like the howl of a wolf-pack filled the shack; half-breed and Indian and Frenchman sprang forward to pull down Cameron as wild dogs might have reached for the life of a bull moose.

"Stand to it, father!"

It was the voice of Malcolm as he smashed a way to the Scot's side.

"Come on, ye black devils," he panted, squaring himself. "Take that, ye hound!" and an Indian shot backward and fell with much clatter on the hard floor.

"Steady, lad, dinna kill onyone," admonished big Sandy, as, with a twist of his wrist, he sent

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the limp body of Descoigne under the table. Then he swung his axe aloft, and the drunkards shrank back as its blade shimmered a vindictive light.

Down came the axe, and a thousand splinters of oak showered the men eager of fight; also a cataract of fire-water bathed their faces and sank into their greasy clothes.

"I've slain the cause o' it a'," cried Sandy. "Dinna strike anyone, lad, they'll no feight noo."

He was right. Under the table, crushed out of his foolish bravado, lay Descoigne, and there were only the splinters of wood to tell of the prime cause of all the strife. The drunkards were cowed. Well they knew that once roused big Sandy was a mountain-lion.

Half-breeds and Indians are wondrous akin to a wolf-pack in their methods of warfare. With an outnumbered foe ferocity stalks as bravery; but when the pinch comes, when acute danger grips at their throats, they slink and are afraid. Had the Scot wavered, even had not the stalwart son stood at his back, the throng might have torn at him till he fell.

"Tak' the Descoigne to his shack," commanded Sandy to the revellers. "I'm thinkin' he's no hurted bad," he continued, as they drew the Frenchman from under the table.

"I'm feared not," commented Malcolm, putting

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his ear close to Descoigne's mouth and listening.
"But you give him his bellyfull of fight, father."

The battle had sobered Malcolm; it had steadied all of them. There was a heavy unreliability in the movements of some as they stepped away from the shack of Félix Benoit, carrying Descoigne; but the imp of debauchery had been exorcised, and already they peeped into a future of transient regeneration.

"Father," said Malcolm, as he walked humbly at Sandy's side, "I'm awful ashamed of it. The stuff just gripped me."

"Dinna talk o' it," commanded Cameron.
"I'm ashamed o' me ain rage—I exceeded me authority."

And so the two contrite ones passed each to his own abode and sat brooding over the sin-blazed trail that leads from conviviality to hatred.

CHAPTER XV

THE forceful regeneration with which the righteous Scot had leavened the post existed for the matter of one night. Next day the resentment of unappeased thirst governed the shiftless dwellers of Fort Donald.

Removed from the subduing presence of the wrathful Cameron, and smarting under the lingual castigation he had administered, they talked with bitterness of his assumption of authority.

Felix Benoit, restless in villany as a copperhead snake, sought to rouse them to retaliation. It was his money that had purchased the liquor from the smugglers, to be tin-cupped out at a huge profit; it was his Red River cart, its wheels muffled to silence by bagging, that had brought the essence of sin, in the dead of night, from Sturgeon Creek, twelve miles to the west.

Yoked to him in villany and in desire for revenge was Joe Descoigne.

Sandy knew that if some drastic measure were not taken to cut off supplies, more liquor would be run in, and then murder outright would surely come to

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someone. In a way, he was almost helpless. He was not a constable; he was possessed of no authority to go out and arrest the whiskey-runners even if he could find them. Gourelot, being a magistrate, could create him an officer; but well he knew that not one citizen except Malcolm would lend a helping hand.

To Descoigne, lying in his shack in the way of rehabilitment, came Felix Benoit with his querulous complaint that the accursed Scot was possessed of a meddlesome design upon their free right to get drunk—that even then he was casting about for a method of trapping their kind friends who had brought them the liquid of good-fellowship from its place of hiding in the Devil's Muskeg.

Then Descoigne conceived of a complex retaliation for several of his enemies. Benoit would go to Factor Gourelot and make confession that Wolf Runner had brought the liquor to Fort Donald. Then the buffalo-headed Scot would occupy himself with the trapping of Wolf Runner while their friends rested in peace. Also would the Indian be punished for having assisted the Protestant outcasts in bringing Minister Bruce to Fort Donald. The matter of convicting the redskin was easy of accomplishment; he was already one who dealt with the persecuted Free Traders. Did not Benoit know of a half-breed who would swear

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Wolf Runner had brought the whiskey; and had not Benoit purchased it from Wolf Runner?

So, when Big Sandy spoke again of the matter to Gourelot, the factor was rich in obtained knowledge.

Mon Dieu! He himself had trailed the Carcajou to his hole. Sacré! The outlaw Wolf Runner was, out of doubt, the man.

"I dinna think it," declared Cameron. "It's no' a nichie at a'; it's just some godless pinto—a breed."

But Gourelot was positive; Benoit had made a clean breast of it.

"I'll no' trail after a herrin'-scent," declared Sandy. "Yon deevil, Felix, is just wantin' us to bell the wrong cat."

For two days there was a dead-lock; it would have lasted longer but for the scream of Captain Ball's river-steamer as she rounded the point above Fort Donald, and swung to its mud-bank to rest for the night on her way to Grand Rapids.

On the Saskatoon was Inspector Lang and a sergeant and two constables of the Mounted Police. They were on their way from Edmonton to Winnipeg.

Strictly speaking, they were not on patrol duty, being due at their destination upon a fixed date. The Saskatoon would connect at Grand Rapids



To Descoigne, lying in his shack, came Felix Benoit.



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with the Lake Winnipeg steamer, and they should proceed by her to Winnipeg.

Whiskey smugglers were desirable game at all times—their suppression was the chief mission of the police; so when Factor Gourelot told how Wolf Runner and his accomplices had set fire to the moral structure of Fort Donald, Inspector Lang became possessed of an itching to gather in the offenders. It would be a feather in his cap. But he must catch the lake steamer, and Wolf Runner was at Vermilion, a hundred miles away.

The factor explained how it might be managed. By hard riding the police could make Vermilion the second night, and return inside of the third day at most. He would put them to Grand Rapids in a "York boat" with eight oarsmen; they would go down the swift current of the Saskatchewan almost as fast as the Saskatoon, and would certainly catch the Lake boat before the Saskatoon's cargo had been portaged over the three miles of Grand Rapids.

At any rate, Factor Gourelot would guarantee the lake steamer would wait for them—"an' also, M'sieu Commandant, you will have your prisoner."

CHAPTER XVI

RESTING in his shack, Joe Descoigne chuckled, hyena-like, over the new villany he had set afoot until his ribs, a-sore from the huge Scotchman's rude clasp, twinged.

But when Benoit fled to him with the news of the police advent, his face became utterly devoid of mirth. He knew Inspector Lang would not stop with the capture of Wolf Runner; Lang had the persistency of an aggravated bear. Even Wolf Runner, if taken, might divulge the hiding-place of the whiskey smugglers, for he was sure to know of it.

When the white mist-clouds rose from the Saskatchewan that night and came up over the tawny earth that was still warm from the sun's kiss, and chilled it like a grave's breath, Descoigne slipped from his shack, pulled his aching body to the saddle on his cayuse, and passed from the post as silently as a bird's shadow flits over the prairie. A mile on the trail he dismounted, and stripped from the hoofs of his blue roan the bags that had stilled the earth's echo. Then he moved faster, and was

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gone on the trail to the Devil's Muskeg—only he avoided the path, leaving the hoof-prints of the blue roan hid in the prairie lest they should bear silent witness against him.

Behind, an hour in arrears, trailed the police outfit on horses furnished by Gourelot. And with them rode Sandy's Malcolm as guide.

Gourelot and the others had all but convinced the police that Wolf Runner was the head of the smuggling gang; but Big Sandy contended stoutly that the whiskey men would be found in the muskeg—in his own time they had been there before; and so he sent Malcolm for the double purpose of clearing Wolf Runner and capturing the actual outlaws.

With the hope in their hearts of a surprise, the police pounded the trail hour after hour, mile upon mile, until at five o'clock in the morning, forty miles stretched from their horses' tails to the old fort. Then for two hours their muscles crept back to a tenseless rest. At seven they were again in the saddles, and eating at the trail; at twelve they had reeled off another thirty-five miles.

"Halt!" commanded Inspector Lang. "Here is water and feed for the horses; we'll rest, and strike the Indian's tepee when he has come home to roost."

At eight o'clock the five shadows were slipping

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almost silently through the shrouded gloom of a poplar bluff, when Malcolm laid his hand on the police captain's arm.

"Halt!" whispered the officer, and as they stood, the Scot leaned far over on his cayuse and whispered: "Three minutes of trail."

The captain slipped from his horse and passed from man to man, giving a smothered order. The sergeant and a constable dropped to the ground, drew the reins over the horses' heads, and passed them to their comrade, who still sat in his saddle. Malcolm tied his cayuse to a white-barked poplar, and the four men went forward afoot.

"We're close," muttered Lang, as the odor of a wood fire came down the wind.

In ten yards a glimmer of light cut the darkness. Again the inspector passed a whispered order, and, circling, they closed on Wolf Runner's tepee from four sides.

As they stood shoulder to shoulder with only the flap of a lodge between them and their quarry, a dog gave a long, dismal howl.

The captain sprang for the opening with eager haste. In its doorway his charge carried him into the arms of Wolf Runner's ponderous squaw with such fierce impact that they were both sent sprawling backward in the recoil.

The sergeant whipped out his gun, thinking the

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Indian was making an escape; then he laughed, and, brushing by his chief, stood in the tepee. There was only the astonished squaw and a frightened little lad cowering behind her dress. They had missed.

From a sense of duty, and without hope, they questioned the Cree woman, who had subsided into a squat attitude of complacent vacuity.

Vehement invective roused her to a constrained, "I don't know;" her small unfathomable eyes had the furtive reticence of a she-bear.

Malcolm was anxious to come into possession of Wolf Runner, with the idea of having the Indian clear himself by leading them to the smugglers; he was sure to know every safe spot in the deadly muskeg.

So, speaking to Mas-ki-sis in Cree, he asked him to tell them where his father was.

"Wolf Runner has gone to make the hunt—to make a kill of mooswa," the boy answered, one hand clutching the skirt of Mi-yah-tis.

Malcolm interpreted the boy's answer. The sergeant sneered.

"The kid's givin' us the double, Captain," he declared. "If the nichie's not here, he's with the gang."

"I'm thinkin' we'd best pull out to the muskeg trail, sir," suggested Malcolm, "though I don't

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believe that Wolf Runner is with them. This job is most like Camoose John's trick. I've heard the muskeg is an old nest to him—he comes up the trail from the south by Vermilion, taps Fort Donald with a permit, hidin' the bulk of it in the swamp, an' then goes on to Fort le Corné an' Prince Albert."

"Do you know this muskeg trail?" asked the inspector of Malcolm.

"Not well. The lad here was to show it me when I went through one time."

"Faith, we'd best jest corral the kid, sir," interrupted Sergeant Heath. "The cub'll lead us to the old un, p'raps."

"I think that's a good idea," replied Inspector Lang. "Just leave a man here, Sergeant, to trap the Indian if he comes back. We'll take the boy and push on to where the trail leads into the muskeg; we'll bottle them up, and in daylight we'll make the kid show us their camp."

When Mas-ki-sis understood that he was to go with the police he was sore afraid, and clung to Mi-yah-tis. In vain Malcolm explained that they meant him no harm; the boy did not believe it. The very name of the Mounted Police was a bugbear. When an Indian did wrong, was he not threatened with these red-coated braves of the pale-face; did not the Indian mothers frighten their chil-

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dren into good behavior with the goblin of the Mounted Police? It was all very well for the ogama to say that they meant him no harm; if that were so, why did they not leave him with his mother? Perhaps it was all lies about the smugglers. Perhaps they had come for his father because of the time Wolf Runner had sought to lose Malcolm Ogama in the muskeg.

When Mi-yah-tis understood they wished to take Mas-ki-sis she became like a she-bear that guards her young, and pleaded with Malcolm. They could take her—she would show them the trail—she would even lead them to the evil white men who dealt in the fire-water, if they would but leave her little Otter, Mas-ki-sis, at home.

When Malcolm interpreted this, the sergeant laughed. "Faith, it would take two bronchos to tote that ugly old squaw."

"It's nonsense," declared the inspector. "Tell the boy to get ready."

Of a certainty a she-bear was about to be robbed of her young; Mi-yah-tis saw they meant taking her little Otter. It's altogether likely that had there been but one white man he would have suffered dismemberment ere he succeeded in the abduction. The little eyes set in the huge face of the Cree woman blazed with fury; they had to use force to take the boy from her strong arms.

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"The ould hag!" grunted Sergeant Heath, as the Ugly One sent him sprawling with a clutch of her strong fingers.

It was Mas-ki-sis who begged his mother to desist; he would go with the police ogama, for he saw that trouble would surely come to Mi-yah-tis.

Leaving a constable in the tepee, and taking the boy, the police went back for their horses and travelled on to the bear's deadfall.

CHAPTER XVII

AT midnight they camped at the huge wooden trap, beside a little stream. Forty yards from their camp was a patch of open prairie, luxuriant in its pea-vine and buffalo-grass, and there the horses were picketed to fill the stomachs grown gaunt on the hurried trail. No fire was lighted; the moon topping the aspen bluff behind them threw a ghostly light over the log pillars of the bear-trap that stood like a gibbet in the edge of the muskeg.

In a low voice Inspector Lang ordered the constable to keep a watch of two hours, then the sergeant was to relieve him. Wrapped in their gray blankets, the three slept with the silent industry of men who had sat in the saddle while their eyes drooped for accustomed rest.

At two o'clock the constable called drowsily: "Sam! Sam!"

The sergeant, oblivious, answered not. Once again: "Sam!"

"What's the matter, man?" a Scotch voice asked; and Malcolm sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Touch the sergeant, Scotty," ordered the constable.

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"Don't wake him," said Malcolm, compassionately; "he's miles in the Happy Hunting Ground. I'll take the watch. I'll just have a smoke, an' after a bit I'll rouse him—let him sleep, man."

The constable hesitated. He would like to give his comrade the benefit of the Scot's devotion. The deep, steady breathing of his friend touched his heart, and he whispered back: "Don't give it away to the captain, then, and turn out the sergeant before you're caught; keep your eye skinned on the kid."

Then he curled up in his blanket, and Malcolm, feeling that he could stay awake for a thousand years, pulled gently at his pipe, and wandered back in spirit to Fort Donald and Franchette.

For half an hour he was very much awake. Each little snort of the feeding horses as they cleared the dust from their nostrils he heard. The whistling whimper of a coyote cutting through the gloom fell upon his tense, listening ear.

Presently something fell and struck him on the ankle; tiny sparks bit at the dry leaves as he looked down—it was his pipe. Most certainly he had dozed for a minute. He laughed nervously and stood up, stretching his long limbs to start afresh the sluggish blood. The crisp, cold night-air blew the stupor of sleep from his nostrils, and he sat

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down again awake; he could even hear the pull of the horses' teeth on the tough prairie-clover.

In ten minutes a pair of bright, ferret eyes peering from an old smoke-yellowed blanket saw in the moonlight the Scot's shaggy head droop forward till his chin rested on his broad chest. A small, slim-fingered hand stretched forth, picked up a stick, and tossed it close to the dozing figure's moccasined feet. The man who slept as he sat never moved.

Mas-ki-sis waited a minute, then rustled his covering. The noise was as the stirring of leaves by the wind; the crouched figure was a statue—as silent.

A little dark shadow glided from beneath the yellow blanket with the silent crawl of a cat, and was lost in the tangle of rose-bush and wolf-willow.

High in a tamarack a pair of big round eyes peered from a saucer face down at the small something that crawled through the grass. The solemn owl's slow mind was pondering over the problem of whether it was a transient supper coming to its death, or an accursed tree-climber after his owlship's thin carcass. A little closer, and the big eyes that see at night knew it was a human; with a whirring cut of its wings the bird swooped close to the crouched sleeper in the camp.

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Malcolm started. "By the Wallace!" he muttered, upbraiding himself, "if I wasn't asleep."

His disturber perched again, laughed back at him in derision: "Whoo-hoo-hoo-o!"

"Ye needn't jeer," muttered the Scot; "ye did me a service. Sergeant! Sergeant!" he continued, softly, and touched the sleeping policeman.

"All's quiet," he said, as the other took his place.

Sergeant Heath looked in the dim light at the yellow blanket. It was simply an involuntary recurrence to duty; there was no thought that the little Indian would seek to escape.

"The kid's asleep," he confided to himself. "Poor little devil!" That was because he had boys of his own at home.

He sat listening intently. Presently the thump of a hoof—a little cough assured him their horses were feeding in content.

Mas-ki-sis, his stomach close to the warm earth, wriggled like a lizard for ten yards; then, rising to his feet and hands, he stole like a little bear through the grass-patch where fed the horses. In his child-mind was the absorbing thought of return to his mother.

At thirty yards he stood up; the next instant he threw himself flat, and burrowed in the pea-vine and whispering grass and white-tasselled yarrow.

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A coyote dashed by him with a stifled whine of affright.

The boy's heart beat at his breast like the thump of a tom-tom; its noise filled his ears—he could scarcely hear the slipping creep of moccasined feet on his trail. Nearer and nearer, the tell-tale whisper of the crisp grass calling louder and louder each second that someone sought Mas-ki-sis. Would the seeker miss him in the earth's tangled cover? The someone was a blood-hound, coming with unerring certainty to his hiding-place.

With a gasp the boy was up and away like a frightened deer. But his little legs, all too short for the holding maze of grass-growth, failed him. A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and once more he was in the toils of the police, he thought.

As he whirled about a greater fear came to him—it was not one of the men he had fled from. He would have cried out in his terror, but strong fingers clutched him by the throat, and a voice whispered in Cree: "Speak not, little one, or I will drive this knife through you. Come with me without noise, and you will not be harmed."

Then his captor, holding him by the arm, led him to the horses, speaking to them in a low, soothing voice as he pulled the picket-pegs.

The three police horses that were picketed, and Malcolm's cayuse that was hobbled, were gathered

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like sheep. Mas-ki-sis was placed on the back of one, and then the new enemy led them straight away from the police camp and into a growth of poplar.

As they travelled, suddenly a horse whinnied a little deeper in the woods. With an oath, the man hurried forward till they came to a cayuse tied to a poplar.

As the horse-thief wrenched the hackamore loose and swung into the saddle, Mas-ki-sis dropped to the ground the two black, white-tipped hawk-feathers that were in his braided hair. They would be a message to Wolf Runner when he came looking for his little Mas-ki-sis, as he surely would.

Then they slipped forward at a walk, the stolen horses hanging back to the leading rein, suspicious of the cayuse they followed.

"Marse!" the horse-thief commanded back to Mas-ki-sis, and the frightened lad, obeying, kicked his heels into the soft flanks of the broncho, and the troop broke into a trot and then into a gallop.

The boy was too frightened to call out; he could only grasp the horse's mane and bend low to escape the sweep of a branch.

On they sped over a jack-pine hill with its holding sand, through an hour's length of moonlit prai-

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rie, and, skirting a poplar bluff that was too thick of growth, splashed through Vermilion Creek.

As they raised out of the creek bottom, and topped its clay bank, the horses swerved in affright at a figure lying beside a smouldering heap of red embers. One of the horses with a snort broke away and clattered across the flat prairie.

As the sleeper sprang to his feet, the thief with an oath rasped sharp spurs up the flank of his mount, and the stolen troop swept on into the night, leaving the startled camper, who was Wolf Runner, looking after them in fear and astonishment. He suddenly turned his head sideways to listen; he could have sworn he had heard a shrill call for help.

CHAPTER XVIII

As the beating hoofs grew silent in the distance, Wolf Runner heard the cayuse that had broken loose tramping about on the prairie. The Indian, soft-stepping with his moccasined feet, went toward the animal. As he approached in the moonlight the horse snorted and plunged forward a few steps. His head was low hung, and seemed anchored. The loose-hanging hackamore had tangled about a foreleg, and, thus accidentally hobbled, Wolf Runner caught him. Then he led him back to the camp-fire, and, hobbling the cayuse more effectually, the Indian threw wood on the smouldering coals.

Over his pipe, yielding its "harouge" incense, he puzzled out this apparition of many horses. The man who had so suddenly appeared and disappeared must be a thief, else why had he not stopped when one of his bunch was lost? Yes, surely it was a case of horse-stealing. They must be of Fort Donald, for the stealer was fleeing from that direction.

Perhaps even this matter of the stolen horses had to do with the traders of fire-water; they had

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passed his solitary camp hours before trailing to the west. Camoose John, the smuggler, wise in the propitiation of anyone who might be bribed to a silent tongue, had given the Indian a bottle, and he, with unusual self-control, still had a part of its contents saved for Mi-yah-tis.

At any rate, the evil spirits were not making bad medicine for Wolf Runner, for he had made a kill of mooswa, and his back was tired from packing the huge hide. Now here was a horse put into his very hands to carry himself and his load; also he would surely get a present of tobacco or powder for returning the cayuse to its rightful owner. He would eat and hasten to his tepee and talk over these things with the Ugly One.

The Indian cut a branch of red willow, stuck a sharpened end in the ground, and tortured a moose-steak over the live coals. When he had eaten it, he looked longingly at the contents of the bottle; there was just enough for Mi-yah-tis. What a glorious thing this fire-water was; also what a devilish thing. How big and strong it made him feel; and how it burned into his very heart, and mastered him, and made him think that he would sacrifice everything of all the beautiful forest and prairie for one long continuous enjoyment of it.

He held the red glinting fluid between his eyes and the fire; he shook the flask, and it was full of

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leaping devils. They smiled at him, they jeered at him. Why were they masters of his race? Why was it that his people were slaves, committing self-murder because of this hot water that burned their throats, and was found nowhere made of Manitou. All the things God had given them to eat and drink were good, and made them strong—this was an invention of the palefaces, for the red man's destruction. It must be true what the Ogama Bruce had said in his Manitou worship at Fort Donald, that a curse had come down to Wolf Runner's people because of the fire-water. But he would save it for Mi-yah-tis, there was just enough—perhaps there was just a little more than enough. In the old days, when the Company traded them fire-water for buffalo-skins, the Ugly One had not drunken of it as did the other squaws; he had never seen her reeling about like a wounded buffalo. Yes, Mi-yah-tis was a good squaw.

Wolf Runner raised the flask to his lips and lessened the portion that was for the Ugly One. Then throwing the moose-pelt over his cayuse's withers, and loosening the hobble, he clambered to the horse's back and trailed toward Vermilion.

Perhaps Calf Shirt would know something of the stolen horses; so Wolf Runner branched from the trail that led by the bear-trap, and passed by the tepee of Calf Shirt.

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His relative knew nothing of the horses; but, according to the method of men, the portion of fire-water that was for the woman most utterly vanished in the tepee of Calf Shirt. Wolf Runner had meant to say nothing of the fire-water, for it was the squaw's; but was it not a chance to astound Calf Shirt with the glamour of his magnificence? Besides, as Wolf Runner remembered, the Ugly One thought more of little Mas-ki-sis than she did of the heart-cheering liquor.

The whiskey that was still in the flask would not have affected a strong white man; but the two red men became babbling children under its influence, and in this state the Indian completed his journey to Vermilion.

CHAPTER XIX

MAS-KI-SIS's captor galloped on unchecked by the broncho's defection until the trees commenced to outline a little against the eastern sky that was now losing the night gloom.

Suddenly swinging from the poplars to prairie, the boy saw the shadowy forms of horses feeding by a stream which ran through a little valley.

The next instant the thief reined up his cayuse, and, after a sharp scrutiny, whistled through his fingers. From the hollow of the little valley a whistle, that was like the echo of his own, came up the hill to them.

Then the horse-thief pushed forward again till he came to two men who guarded a wagon. Mas-ki-sis saw, with a thrill of fear, the unwinking eyes of two rifles staring at him.

"What th' devil've you got?" one of the men said, addressing the horse-thief, and peering into the boy's face.

"Plenty broncho; what you zink dey is?"

"The kid's not a broncho, is he?"

For answer the horse-thief threw himself from

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the saddle, and, leading the questioner to one side, said: "When I pull out from you las' night an' hit ze trail for home, by Gar! I see ze police horse. Dey haf put ze little nichie on guard over ze bronchos. Mon Dieu! but dey are stupid an' lazy. Dey sleep, slēep, while ze cub is watch. I am creep up on ze broncho. Sacré! I see dis nichie. By damn! quick I have him, so quick he make no squeak. I mus' take him, if not he mak' alarm."

"Where does the kiċd belong, Descoigne?"

"How I know me? You mus' tak'—how long you keep ze broncho?"

"Till they're done up."

"Well, when you cut out dese horse, let ze kiċd go. I t'ink dey find dere way back together. Give him grub."

"What about th' police, Joe?"

"Ha, ha! I have set ze outfit afoot. Dey mus' go back—p'r'aps they have catch Wolf Runner, I don't know—wit'out horse dey can't catch not'ings."

"Is the kiċd on to you, Joe?"

"No. An' now I mus' go so he don't see me. Soon be daylight I t'ink."

Mas-ki-sis saw his captor mount and strike across the prairie to the north. Descoigne meant to make a wide detour by Metis Mission and avoid the Vermillion trail.

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- The Indian lad did not know what new evil the fates had in store for him; but somehow he breathed freer when the horse-thief had gone; in that man's presence he had been possessed of dread.

Then the whiskey smugglers harnessed to their wagon the horses of Descoigne's gift, leading their own, and started to the west.

CHAPTER XX

SERGEANT SAM, fighting the enthrallment of denied sleep, heard the whinny of Descoigne's cayuse as the Frenchman fled with the police horses. It started him into wakefulness, and he listened for reassuring sounds from the grass field where their steeds fed. It was strangely silent.

"I wonder if there's any diviltry up," he muttered. But wondering over the problem brought little beyond the continued grave-like calm; so he slipped quietly from his sleeping companions and explored the patch of open prairie.

Not a horse was there.

The discovery quickened him into excited movement; he ran here and there. Once he careened headlong over yards of turf, his eager feet rudely snatched from under him by an entanglement of dogberry. Somehow the tumble steadied his ruffled senses. Beyond doubt the horses had been stolen.

He hurried to the camp and shared this wondrous discovery with the chief; also enlarged the store of his knowledge by the further development

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that under the yellow blanket was nothing but grass-land—no Mas-ki-sis. The fragment of Indian humanity had stolen their horses of a certainty, and Wolf Runner must have helped in the robbery.

It was a performance close cousin to a miracle to take the boy from under their noses and the horses from within their hearing.

In their opinion Wolf Runner had achieved to the possibility of a hanging; but, alas! in the meantime he had set them afoot, and they were like mastless boats that tossed on an empty sea.

Then they scurried like rabbits up and down the land, through the tantalizing gloom of the moon's foolish light, and found nothing beyond innumerable roots and countless ant-hills that played ten-pins with their hastening legs. They might as well have sat in the camp and watched for the dawn—finally they did; and when it came, with the slow solemnity that the breaking day has, they went out and found the broad trail of many horses that followed their leader.

They pursued the mocking hoof-prints, reviling themselves inwardly for the foolishness of it—for the man that steals horses in the night goes beyond the reaching of men set afoot. And presently they came to the trail of iron-shod wheels cutting

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in from the direction of the muskeg, and they knew that this was Camoose John, his mark.

At the tree where Descoigne's cayuse had waited, Malcolm called a halt, and cast about the ground for something that might disturb the utter emptiness of their knowledge.

"It was that devilish kid," he exclaimed, as he picked from the earth a black and white hawk-feather Mas-ki-sis had cast from his braided hair. The Scot held it aloft in confirmation.

"And here Wolf Runner tied his cayuse," added the inspector, "and they're away together. We might as well chase the rainbow as follow them afoot, and we might as well go back again as seek for the smugglers. Wolf Runner has given them warning, and they're away, with our horses to help."

Almost mechanically Malcolm passed along the disturbed trail; the others, empty of wiser action, followed.

Presently the Scotchman knelt down and examined the trail carefully.

"I'm botherin' how Camoose got wind of us at all," he said.

"Why, the little nichie gave them word and they got out—they're all away together."

"It's not that," answered Malcolm. "They wasn't together here at all; the wagon-track is

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hours older than the horse-trail. Don't you see the spider-webs in the wagon-rut holdin' lots of dew; and the hoof-prints of our bronchos has hardly any spider-web or dew either. There was no dew fallin' toward morning. I was awake and know that. That's why the horse-tracks are dry. And, besides, our horses was gallopin', and the whiskey outfit trottin'; they wouldn't be doin' that if they was together—they couldn't do it. No, they got word long before the kid skipped us, hours before."

"It must have been Wolf Runner, though," commented Lang, "or the boy wouldn't have gone with him."

"If it was Wolf Runner, somebody from Fort Donald took word to him that we was comin'."

"Well," replied the captain, "they're gone now, and I've got to go back."

Lang had, so to speak, fulfilled his part of the contract with Factor Gourelot, all but the tantalizing variation of Wolf Runner's having purloined their horses instead of allowing himself to be complacently arrested.

But, brushing aside the consideration of results, the police captain's duty was paramount—he must hasten back to Fort Donald and proceed to Winnipeg. So they moodily ate a light breakfast, and, packing on their backs the saddles they had

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so lately bestrode, took up the trail; a hundred miles of foot-work, and at the end of it covert joy awaiting them at the hands of the aborigines at Fort Donald. It was not a prospect to instigate hilarity, and the quartette, in procession, conducted themselves like pall-bearers.

Cameron was loping along in front, possessed of an unspeakable discontent; in-toed like an Indian he plodded, the very earth feeling the strong impact of his resentment.

Suddenly he stopped, crouched down, and peered into the saucer-like prints of hoofs.

"Someone's been hittin' the trail since our goin'," he said. "He's not long ahead of us," he continued, in monologue; "it's since sun-up—there's no little spider-webs in the tracks."

"Must be Wolf Runner," commented the sergeant; "for gall an Indian has got the whole world beat flat."

"It's pretty rich," added the captain; "to steal our nags and ride one home under our very noses takes the bun."

"You can't tell," objected Malcolm; "the nichies are always scourin' through the woods like rabbits; it may be just a chance traveller."

The mocking hoof-prints seemed to jeer at them from the trail as they plodded onward. Even had the Indian appeared a dozen yards ahead, waiting

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to give them the laugh, they would not have been surprised.

Five hundred yards short of Vermilion the cayuse tracks left the trail and were almost lost in the matted turf of the unbeaten prairie.

"A new deviltry!" said the captain, speaking low. — "We must split up. — Sergeant, you and Cameron trail the horse, and we'll go on to the tepee. Don't follow the cayuse over half a mile, we haven't much time to waste now."

"There's no use of stalking the tepee," he added to the constable, as the two proceeded; "if Wolf Runner's there, White'll have nailed him."

At the lodge Captain Lang called, "Constable," and in his right hand he held a gun ready for emergencies.

Through the slit of the tepee a man emerged, and Constable White stood erect and saluted.

"Well?" queried the captain.

"He's in there, sir," answered the constable, thrusting his thumb over his shoulder.

"Wolf Runner?"

The policeman nodded.

"When did he come?"

"An hour ago, sir—walked right in on me as I was at grub-pile. He was packin' a jag——"

"Drunk?" queried the captain, in astonishment.

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"Pretty near, sir; he had an empty bottle, so I guess the liquor give out before he got paralyzed."

"Was the boy with him?"

"No, sir; ain't you got him?"

Even as they talked Malcolm and the sergeant came up with the stolen horse.

"We found him hobbled in a dip in the prairie, sir," reported Sergeant Sam.

"Bring out the nichie till I question him," commanded Lang.

To the captain's query the Indian explained how he had come by the horse.

The tale was such a tax on their credulity, such an evident tribute to the stupidity of a white man in general, that the inspector laughed in derision.

But where was Mas-ki-sis? Wolf Runner did not know; he even asked the police officer for knowledge of the boy; they had taken him—where was he?

Again the inspector laughed; the whole thing was too patent. Wolf Runner had communicated some signal to the little imp as they slept at the bear's deadfall—even as the sentry slept. Then the two, father and son, wolf and cub, had run off their horses, the kid had carried them on to the whiskey smugglers, and Wolf Runner, circling wide of their camp, had ridden in haste back to

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his own tepee, perhaps to get grub and speak with his squaw, meaning to clear out again. But Constable White, of whom he did not know, had ambushed him. In the clatter of the horse-stealing probably Mas-ki-sis had forgotten to tell his father of the redcoat in the tepee.

Everything was against the Indian. Why did he circle the trail as a man hunts a moose—why did he not ride straight up to his tepee instead of caching the horse, if his tale were true—why was not Mas-ki-sis there with his mother if he had not run off the horses? Did not Wolf Runner come home saturated with the atmosphere of his liquor friends? Bah! they were losing time. Their luck was not all out though, for had they not trapped the chief villain? Onward to Fort Donald; not with celerity, to be sure, but still with fair speed because of the long-striding Scotchman. They left the saddles with Mi-yah-tis to be sent for. A saddle was all right between one's legs and on a good horse, but on one's back for the matter of a hundred miles it was a thing to be dispensed with. The solitary cayuse was made a party to the pilgrimage.

As the mixed lot, those of the redcoats, the big Scot, the swarthy Indian, and Inspector Lang athwart the knock-kneed cayuse, moved out in solemn defile, a pair of whiskey-jacks stared at

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them in amazement from the poles of a meat-drying rack. The blue-gray birds even followed the wondrous procession for a mile, offering derisive chirps of disapprobation.

They made Fort Donald in two days, with feet crying out in anguish because of the incessant activity.

Sergeant Sam had an extended vocabulary of Celtic reproach for people he disapproved of, but long before the white-washed shack that was the Hudson Bay fort glimmered on their vision he had exhausted his rhetoric, and walked in sullen resentment as silent as Wolf Runner.

"My God! the heathen—the damnable pagan!" Malcolm had iterated over and over again; "there's no trustin' a yellow-skinned human. Yon time of the race he was for drownin' me in the Devil's Lake, then he was a friend of mine; and the now I'm a-ridin' Shank's mare a hundred miles because of his deviltry. My conscience, the heathen!"

The advent of the wayfarers was like the coming of a circus. The post dwellers thronged to the fort and gazed in speechless, unholy rapture upon their humiliation. To be set afoot by the men they had sought was a retribution beyond anything the men of Fort Donald had prayed

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for. Descoigne and Benoit were in the seventh heaven of exalted triumph.

That the police had captured Wolf Runner, who was as innocent of the whiskey-running as big Sandy himself, was superb. Had ever such happiness come to Fort Donald—was it not a place favored of the gods?

Gourelot put on the magisterial air of a chief-justice when the Indian was brought before him for a preliminary hearing.

And the evidence! Mon Dieu! who could doubt the evidence? Also the police must proceed in the York boat, for the steamer had gone.

The Indian would go with his captors to Winnipeg. Their evidence would insure him a long, long rest from villany—a protracted residence at the "Queen's Hotel"—which was Stony Mountain jail.

Gourelot had drunken of the smuggled fire-water, but how was he to know whence it came? Also was he not now like a reformed inebriate, more bitter than one who had never fallen? And horse-stealing! Perhaps they would even hang Wolf Runner.

So the police drifted down the Saskatchewan to Grand Rapids, and in all Fort Donald there was only one man of strong discontent—big Sandy. "I dinna believe it; I dinna believe it," he re-

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peated to Malcolm. "It's yon blue wolf, Descoigne, that's brewed this uncanny thing; but I'll hae him yet—I'll hae him yet, or I'm no' a Hielandman."

"I'm afraid Wolf Runner stole the horses, father," declared Malcolm.

CHAPTER XXI

IN the west no one goes afoot to the commitment of villany, therefore the man who takes to himself the unearthing of evidence seeks first the horse.

Logically enough, big Sandy concluded that if Descoigne were at the bottom of this new mischief his cayuse would have been an impressed accomplice. In fact the Scot's eye had been taking notes while the police were out chasing the gray goose. He saw that Felix Benoit went no more to Descoigne's, therefore the Frenchman must be away or dead. Sandy's luck was so bad just then that the latter possibility he quickly dismissed from his mind.

There were reasons why he should not visit Joe's house and satisfy his curiosity. In that land of self-preservation a man's shack was most emphatically his castle, and a much smaller bulk than Sandy's big frame would have proved easy for Descoigne at a hundred yards. Also had the battered Frenchman sent a friendly notice, with his

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compliments, that he would shoot the spiller of their liquor if he kept not off the grass.

For two days after the police fared forth to the prairie Sandy failed to locate his enemy's cayuse; on the third, just at the little foot-hills behind Fort Donald where the purple prairie-clover grew shoulder to shoulder, he came upon the blue roan ineffably dispirited from the lethargy of overwork.

"I kenned it, mon, I kenned it," Sandy repeated to himself, as he fished from capacious pockets a bait of precious oats.

Sandy could have outwitted a wolverine, and he soon had the tired cayuse in the witness-box of his close scrutiny.

The horse was guiltless of shoes, but the fore-hoofs carried tiny holes and the hollowed soles which go with feet that have been lately shod. The nigh hoof was worn to the extent of a full day's travel shoeless; from the off-foot the iron crescent had been taken but lately.

"It's vera clear," Sandy muttered; "he just dropped a shoe yonder, an' wi' the cunning o' a serpent pulled the other since he came back. I'd gie twenty skins for this saxpence-worth o' iron, an' forty for yon lost one."

As he trudged back Cameron pieced it out in his mind. Felix Benoit, who was brother in sin

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to Descoigne, and also post blacksmith, would have pulled the shoe.

Now a half-breed throws away nothing but money, and horseshoes were rare as jewels, so beyond doubt Félix would have carried this asset to his little blacksmith shop. Big Sandy must become possessed of that.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL day the whiskey smugglers trailed with feverish haste, eating into the western horizon with wondrous speed. The horses they urged with brutal persistency were not their own, and to be cast off at night. Also the outlaws raced for a big stake—their liberty, perhaps their lives.

To little Mas-ki-sis, perched in the wagon, dumb from the recurrence of so much adventure, his black eyes possessed of the hunted look that comes of habit to a hounded deer, the captors were most kind; even pity was in the hearts of the rough men for the cub they took so far from his home.

When the western sky was ablaze with the red light of autumn evening they outspanned and cooked a hurried meal. Then the leader, Camoose Jack, talked with much dreaded seriousness to Mas-ki-sis. They hobbled the stolen horses, bidding the boy rest there all night beside the feeding animals, and, in the morning, take them back over the trail.

The outlaws spelled for two hours; then they

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put in their own horses, leaving food for the little Indian. Camoose patted the boy's shoulder and swung to his seat on the wagon; the horses stretched to the traces with the foolish rush of bronchos, and the load of whiskey was started. In ten yards the driver threw his horses almost on their haunches, and, turning to his companion, said: "Dakota, we're a pair of nichies. I'm up against it good and hard; the kid ain't got no cover—just stake him with this," and he handed Dakota a gray regulation blanket.

Then the outfit slipped forward again and became obliterated shadows in the big waste of darkened prairie.

Mas-ki-sis sat crouched like a badger listening to the rumble of the wagon-wheels that grew fainter and fainter, until he was left alone with the tired, feeding horses—a wee lost waif of humanity.

As the animals moved in their feeding, he moved too. He had the Indian's full dread of the dark. Mah-chee Manitou, or Wie-sah-ke-chack, with his evil habit of changing into an animal, would most assuredly find him—perhaps he himself would be turned into a prairie-chicken or a gopher before morning. The hobbled beasts were friends; he clung to them as to brothers. When their stomachs were rounded and taut as

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tom-toms from the lentil grass, they stretched themselves wearily on the earth and slept with asthmatic gasps.

Mas-ki-sis crept close to the pinto he had ridden the night before and nestled against his back. As he huddled there, the cayuse reached his nose over and put the small human through a mental catechism. It was a suspicious investigation, for the pinto was about to trust himself to the dangers of a sleep. Mas-ki-sis put his little hand up and stroked the ill-formed nozzle of the cow-hocked ~~beast~~. The pinto gave a sigh of content—of trust, and let his head of archaic design droop lower and lower, till his chin rested on the soft pillow of the much-grassed prairie, and slept in the abnegating thought that at his back was the wise protection of a human friend. The restfulness of the cayuse deadened the acute fears of the boy. No wolf would tackle him with the prospect of combat with the hard-hoofed steeds of the prairie; even evil spirits kept aloof from horses. A gentle warmth stretched out from the pinto and lulled the little waif to sleep.

Once a harsh-voiced loon floated like a lost spirit over the sleeping group, and its whistling lament startled Mas-ki-sis into open-eyed fear. But it was only a loon, a silly, wandering loon

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with its useless cackle of despair, and he slept again.

An hour before daylight the boy's bed commenced to fall asunder; the pinto was admonishing his little friend that he meant to arise and garner more of the luscious grass.

As the horses fed, Mas-ki-sis ate of the bannock and fried bacon the whiskey man had given him. At the first flush of gray he unshackled the horses' legs, the pinto's last, and clambered to his roach-backed spine; then, rounding up the little bunch, he started over the back trail. All day he rode, with one rest at noon for grass-eating. Well on in the afternoon the two horses that had been following, feeling in their now empty stomachs the glamour of the clover and wild oat and pea-vine, commenced to loiter by the way.

Mas-ki-sis pushed on. In the evening he came to the poplar to which Descoigne's cayuse had been tied. The boy slipped from the pinto's back and searched for the feathers he had dropped. They were gone. Had his father, Wolf Runner, found them? Surely not, else he had come seeking for his boy. Ah! there was one, blown a little into the bluff by the wind. With boyish thoughtlessness Mas-ki-sis let go the hackamore and ran to the feather. As he stooped to pick it up the glint of a polished horseshoe caught his

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eye. The Indian instinct told him it belonged to the man who had stolen him and the horses. It was caught in a root that had wrenched it from the hoof of the thief's cayuse. He gave a little whoop of delight.

At that instant, like a thousandfold echo of the boy's cry, a wolf's howl came cutting its way upwind from the forest.

Left to himself the horse had grazed a little along the trail, and as the wolf-cry fell upon his ear he raised a startled head, the big eyes wild in affright.

Mas-ki-sis raced for the hackamore; his headlong rush completed the pinto's distress, and he fled in terror, clattering back over the trail by which he had come. Mas-ki-sis realized that nothing would stop the animal until he reached the two of his own kind. The boy, set afoot as decisively as the police force had been, gazed ruefully at the sky that was fast losing its light, and thought of the miles of darkened trail that stretched between him and his mother. How warm the tepee would be; how cold and dismal the poplar bluff that fringed the bleak muskeg would prove. But to tramp alone for hours and hours over the trail that at night was in the possession of wolves and coyotes, and evil spirits, and surly muskwa, the bear—it was dreadful.

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His moment of indecision was cut short by a fierce bark dying away into a drawn-out howl; he had almost forgotten the wolves. Their cry sounded nearer this time; they must have winded him and the cayuse. He looked up at the trees; he might perhaps seek safety in one of them. The poplar limbs were so slight he would surely fall out in the night. If he could only cache himself high on a rude platform, as he had seen Wolf Runner cache the meat of a moose.

Ah, he had it—the bear's deadfall. His father had covered its top with limbs once and made a cache of it. It was close by. His blanket had fallen from the pinto's back; picking it up, still clinging to his horseshoe, Mas-ki-sis scuttled away for the log haven of safety as fast as his little legs could carry him.

With the blanket corner in his teeth, he climbed a log post and was safe; all but the evil spirits. Safe from the wolves, his boy's mind, made tense by fear, reverted to the ever-present demons of the air, the wicked spirits—surely they abode in that dark muskeg.

From the poplar forest came the clanging bell-notes of wolves in chase; they were stealing up the boy's scent like ghouls. Now he could see shadows twisting in and out amongst the trees in the gathering gloom. They were working closer and

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closer in circling paths—wary, but relentless. Now they sat on their haunches almost beneath the deadfall—three of them. Their hungry eyes pierced the gloom with covetous glance; their nostrils tickled with the tantalizing odor of something cached. Why were the good things of life, the flesh without power of combat, always left high and safe on those degraded log stands?

Mas-ki-sis could hear the sniffing of his audience; the soft shuffle of their cautious feet, muffled by the yielding grass, as they paced in impatient longing back and forth, round and round, and up and down—even at times springing against the smooth, barkless posts, as a dog essays a tree in quest of prey.

A little farther back in the forest a coyote, jackal-like, whimpered plaintively. Why did not his big brothers, the timber wolves, make a kill?—perhaps there would be something for him at the finish. Another coyote echoed his carping lament, and another—until there seemed a cordon of them, keeping back from the wolves, lest they themselves should furnish the feast.

Mas-ki-sis pulled the blanket over his head, as a train-dog or a fox sleeps with his tail across his nose. There was a slight solace in the presence of his fierce attendants, their din might keep away the muskeg demons.

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Once the boy uncovered his head quickly; surely he had heard a voice. As he listened he heard it again, a plaintive whip-poor-will, as the bird of sorrow sailed with soft-rustling wing over the trail that was possessed of the hungry ones.

Down on the darkened earth were round, gleaming balls of fire, the lurid yellow-green eyes of the eager timber wolves. He blotted them out with his blanket again, and tried to sleep.

Sometimes the animals snarled and snapped at each other; sometimes Mas-ki-sis heard the soft suck of a wolf's breath, as, panting, he jumped at the posts; and again they would yap with impatient, gasping barks, and from the outer edge would come an answering chorus of whistling moans from the waiting coyotes.

For the space of many moons Mas-ki-sis lived through the night. It seemed to him as though something must have happened to the sun—surely the daylight should have come long, long ago. Many times he peeped stealthily from his blanket at the blinking stars that were so all-unconscious of the wolves' wrath.

At last the stars were surely fading and creeping away to sleep; the trees were stepping a little apart from the blurred mass of dark shadow they had been. Yes, day was coming. Fan-like blades of pink and gold shot quivering into the blue-gray



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vault from which the stars were now lost; the night, harbinger of his enemies, was fleeing to the forest before the Sun-God. Small wonder his tribe's enemies, the Blackfeet, had been sun-worshippers. In his heart was a hymn of joy. Even the gray mist that had chilled him was brushed aside like a veil by his friend the Sun-God.

The wolf leader, big and gaunt, fearful of the light, had grown restless. Twice he trotted a little into the poplar bluff and barked to the two pups to follow him; but they, eager in their hunger and foolish in their youth, still prowled close to the bear-trap.

Mas-ki-sis watched his enemies in apprehension. He thought that with the coming of day they would have gone; but the old dog had almost given up trying to coax the others away, and was now back again, his gray, scraggy muzzle sniffing furtively at the small human on the deadfall.

The boy saw him suddenly whip about, point his nose up the wind that was rustling the gold-tinged leaves of the poplars, and stand tense as a statue, the crest of black-tipped hair down his spine erect. Floating on the morning air came the sound of something rushing through the forest.

With a "Yap, yap, yap!" eager of chase, the dog-wolf bounded into the air and was gone, the

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two pups at his heels. Mas-ki-sis knew not whether it was a moose or a black-tail that had led his enemies away. It mattered not, they were gone.

He slipped from his loft and ran through the poplar bluff, and out into the smiling prairie that was coral strewn with the red buds of seeding wild-rose.

How like a saffron smoked moose-skin the plain was, with its wealth of gold-stained shrub, and grass, and leaf, the boy thought, as the gloom of the forest fell from his spirits.

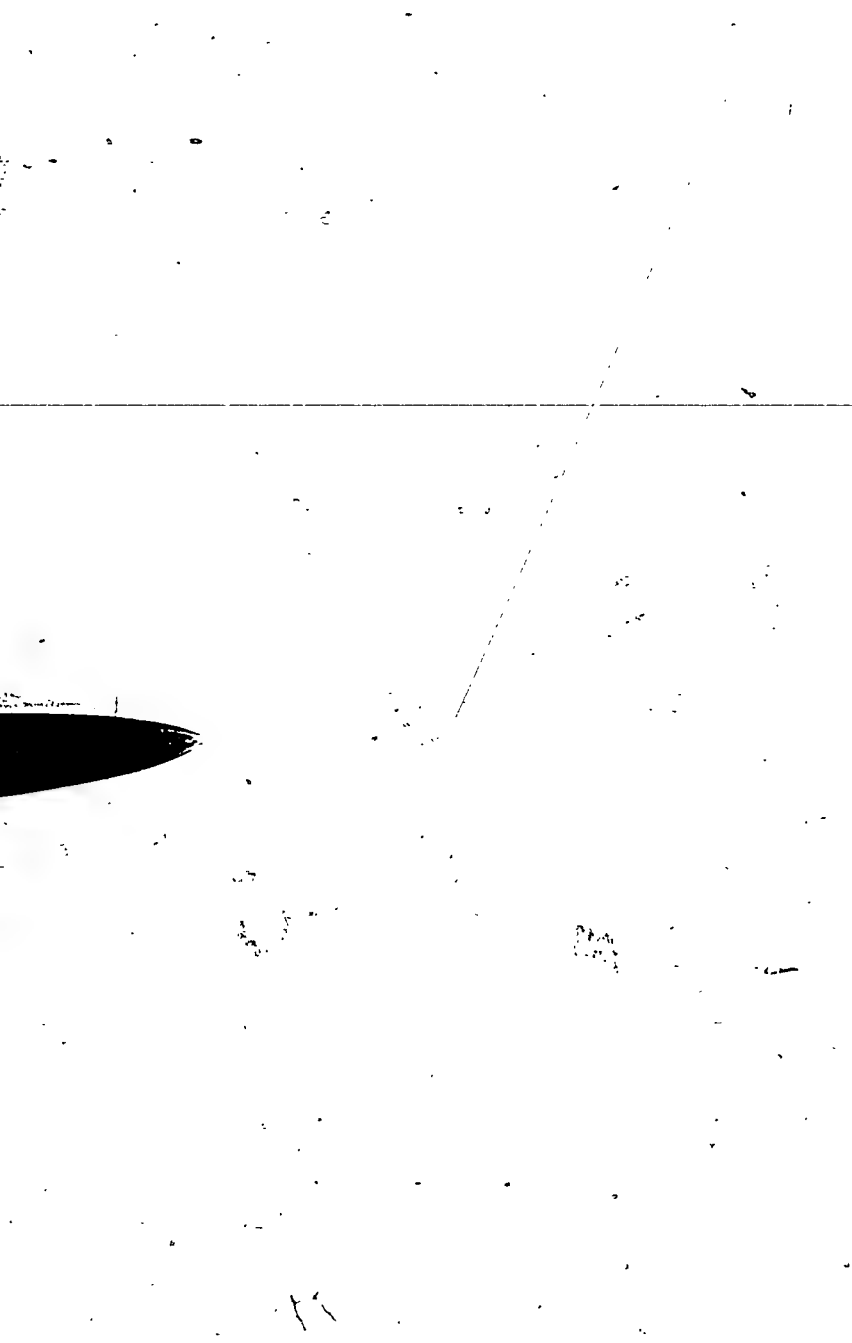
And beyond, not so far now, was his mother, Mi-yah-tis. She would no doubt think him dead, eaten by the wolves, or changed into a forest dweller by Wie-sah-ke-chack. Perhaps the police ogama would have told her that he had been carried off by horse-thieves.

He quickened his pace with these thoughts, and ran till something thrust a knife in his side—the pain was just like that.

The trail cut through a small arm of the muskeg, and as the boy trudged slower because of the pain, he saw all through the deep-mossed flat a myriad fleet of fairy boats. On every shrub and bunch of reed-grass were gossamer spider-webs, boat-shaped, their holding strands turned to white sails by the clinging dew. It was a beautiful sight,



Mas-ki-sis (the Indian boy).



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and Mas-ki-sis smiled, for his heart was light because of his escape.

For three hours his feet beat longingly at the lengthened trail. As he dipped into a hollow from over a hill covered with gnarled, black-spotted jack-pine, he saw a wide figure, made evident by the fierce splendor of a crimson shawl, coming through the grass with heavy vigor. The joy of heaven came to the pagan mind; it was the advent of the sweetest being in all his world—his mother.

The poor old heart, torn of fear and disconsolate waiting, tried beyond silent endurance, had ached and ached, until its chords, vibrating with a nameless dread, had caught up the call of a deserted child somewhere off in the waste of forest and prairie, until the mother could find no peace except in unreasoning search, and had wandered down the trail of expectancy in the faint hope that the prairies might yield up her little Mas-ki-sis, and living.

The boy raced down the slope with a whoop of joy. Even the ponderous squaw quickened into an awkward trot when she saw through the old, bleared, strained eyes the darling that she had given up as lost.

How she crooned, and wept, and laughed, and stroked the black, matted hair, and held in her

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big, strong arms the little cub; and for a time the evil that had come to Wolf Runner, and the dreary hours that she had sat alone in her tepee, faded from her mind, and she laid her copper cheek against the little face and was happy.

Presently the mother made a sling of her shawl, just as she had in the old days when Mas-ki-sis was a tiny cub, and told her boy to ride it on her broad back. He laughed; he wasn't tired; but with strong hands she swung him to her shoulder, the twist of the shawl across her forehead, and trudged on.

Mas-ki-sis humored her for a little, patting the gray-streaked head. When they had gone half a mile he cried that she was hurting him; and when the mother stopped, he slipped to the ground, and, taking her hand, they plodded back to Vermilion and the lodge that was devoid of its master.

There Mas-ki-sis was made into a prince, a mighty chief; the big leather sack of pemmican was brought forth, and a sustenance for three men chopped from its brick-like holding. And as it melted in the pan, the gentle odor of saskatoon berries tickled the eager hunger of Mas-ki-sis until, unchecked, he chased a morsel with foolish fingers and burnt them.

And when he was like a ball, or a bear-cub that had harvested without stint the luscious white sil-

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ver berries, he was rolled in a blanket, and Mi-yah-tis listened to his tale of adventure.

He had grown old in two days, and already had thought out that the man who had stolen the horses was from the way of Fort Donald, and the horseshoe was to find him.

The eye of Mi-yah-tis flashed at sight of the iron circlet. And her little Otter had, out of wisdom, preserved this thing. Yes, the thief was surely of the Company's post—they alone in that territory put metal to the feet of their cayuses. From where had come all this wisdom to the little Otter?

But poor, tired Mas-ki-sis was even then asleep; and the Ugly One sat and tried to unravel the tangle of happenings that had come into her simple life. Her mind worked with the reluctant vagaries of a Red River cart. Trouble of this sort had been subject for Wolf Runner's solving. She had chopped the wood, and scraped with the strong moose-shank the hides, and tanned them in a lung-choking smoke. She had carried water, and made the fire, and cooked the food. And now the hours and hours of mental strain produced little out of all the exertion; Wolf Runner had been taken for another's crime—taken to the post.

Simply, like the gray light of a breaking day, the thought that she too should go to the post to



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be near him came to her. Mas-ki-sis knew what the others did not—even Wolf Runner did not know.

Yes, she would go. This determination rested her mind; she drifted back in contemplation of the bereft misery of the past two nights.

The dream of the medicine-man at the naming of Mas-ki-sis had been a red-faced goblin.

The Blood Lilies were blossomed into red lakes out on the prairie; a hundred times she had peered forth from her tepee in apprehensive expectancy of seeing the moon sullen in red anger.

Its silvered peace had reassured her. The lameness of disaster would not come to Mas-ki-sis even at the time of the Blood Lilies until the red moon fell upon them, as in the medicine-man's dream.

Besides, Mas-ki-sis, the Lame One, was yet to be a brave.

The soothing grace of thankfulness lulled to sleep the tired spirit of the Ugly One, and, with an arm across the boy's shoulder, in gentle guard, the two rested side by side.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the morning Mi-yah-tis went to Calf Shirt and borrowed his-cayuse, for in Calf Shirt's tepee was her sister.

This equine patriarch had been pack-animal for both families for moons since the unlucky day that Wolf Runner's outfit of dogs had essayed close communion with short-tempered muskwa. The bear had utterly demolished Wolf Runner's transport department.

It was noon when the Ugly One reached back to Mas-ki-sis. Then the tepee was struck, a travois made from its poles, and all the worldly goods that were Wolf Runner's, even the lodge itself, put on the wheelless vehicle, and with the boy atop, the Cree woman, her slow mind still troubling over the crushing problem, drove the languorous cayuse toward Fort Donald. Mas-ki-sis would tell the police ogama all the truth.

It was easy to know, if one had wisdom such as the ogamas had, when anyone made straight talk, and spoke not with a forked tongue. Also her

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wise little Otter had the horseshoe. Not any cayuse that Wolf Runner could have got from Calf Shirt would have iron on its hoofs.

And the police ogama was a servant to the Great White Mother, and was not of the Company; so, when Mas-ki-sis spoke true, Wolf Runner would be given back to her.

Plodding, plodding in mind and body, hiding the torturing doubts behind a stolid face, the faithful of Wolf Runner came to the post that was empty of the man she sought. Only, a mile back on the trail, which was a good place to camp, she left Mas-ki-sis and the cayuse, and went in alone, because of her forest cunning.

Yes, Wolf Runner had gone with the police ogama to Fort Garry; everybody knew that. Those who spoke of it when the Cree woman listened knew not whom she was, and said perhaps they would hang Wolf Runner, or perhaps he would only be shot. But it was as true as the everlasting continuance of the Company that he would never return.

Mi-yah-tis went back to Mas-ki-sis, and together they put up the lodge. The Ugly One put some red streamers on willow sticks to keep away the anger of Mah-chee Manitou.

She did not know because of reading that all things come to them that wait; but she waited,

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telling no one what Mas-ki-sis knew, nor of the horseshoe.

Mi-yah-tis had never been in Fort Donald before, so she was known of no one. She was just an old squaw that fished and made moccasins, and perhaps she had a husband who was away with some trading outfit, or perhaps he was dead. Anyway, she was but an old squaw, that would go away presently as unnoticed as she had come.

Had Malcolm chanced upon Mi-yah-tis he might have recognized her, or he might not.

Each time the Ugly One came into the post she heard something. Once somebody said, vindictively, that if Wolf Runner were hanged or shot it would serve him right. Even if he were not a horse-thief, he was most certainly a fool. Had he not helped the heretical unbelievers against the little priest, and was not the factor a good Catholic, and was he not the sole arbiter of all their fortunes? Was not he also a magistrate, with the redcoats, the police, to do his bidding? What chance, then, had Wolf Runner to escape some ill-fortune after helping in the downfall of Père Lemoine?

Many little things that the Ugly One heard confirmed her in the habit of a still tongue. When Wolf Runner, who was a brave, and could speak out, had been bundled away like a snared gopher,

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what chance for her, a slave of a workwoman, to speak?

Was it not true, this saying of her people, the Crees, that all the palefaces spoke with a forked tongue, and had in their hearts only hate for the redmen? For eight moons Mi-yah-tis had thought with favor of the tall moneas—surely he was an ogama—who had held Wolf Runner from death in the blizzard; and then he had come like a thief with the redcoats and taken little Mas-ki-sis, and next her brave, and left her tepee desolate.

Long ago, when the Crees had lived under their great chief, Sweet-Grass, one who had trouble would go to him and speak, and the truth would always obtain justice. And the Ugly One had heard that the great White Mother of the palefaces was like Sweet-Grass. Mi-yah-tis knew that she could not speak with the White Mother; but she had heard her people in the tepees talking that at Fort Garry was the White Mother's husband, or brother, or perhaps it was only her son.

Many days it took the reluctant-working mind of Mi-yah-tis to formulate even a visionary plan. If Mas-ki-sis could tell the true tale of the horse-stealing to the Queen's Minor Chief, who was really the Governor, at Fort Garry, then surely Wolf Runner would be sent back home.

At first this seemed impossible of attainment;

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but gradually, day by day, it came into the Ugly One's understanding that Mas-ki-sis might go on the big fire-canoe to Fort Garry and bring Wolf Runner back. The boy must go alone, it would take so long to earn money for the going of both.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As the beaver harvests his poplar-bread for the winter, and with scarcely more of reasoning, the squaw of Wolf Runner accumulated funds for the achieving of this tremendous purpose. She tanned the three moose-skins that had been fresh at the going of her brave, and sold them to Factor Gourelot; but it was a long round to the realization of coin. From the factor she got nothing but trade; so she took tobacco and silk handkerchiefs, and these were sacrificed at half their value for money to some of the post dwellers.

Mas-ki-sis built a little weir in Otter Creek and caught gold-eye, doré, and jack-fish; and he snared prairie-chicken; and all these beyond their own eating were given in trade.

Higher up Otter Creek, where cut banks of blue shale notched its tortuous bed, grew spruce and tamarack; and there wapoos, the hare, had his many run-ways. Here Mas-ki-sis put his cunning snares of deer sinew, that, when loosened by push of silly wapoos's empty head, snatched him high in the air till he strangled to death as though he had

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been a fierce murderer. On the back of wapoos was the fat of rich autumn feeding; and in the tepee that was devoid of its master the pot was kept forever and ever bubbling, to the end that the little brave might eat and grow strong to the reclamation of his father.

Early as it was, the fur of wapoos was nearly prime, so Mi-yah-tis sun-tanned the pelts, wove them into a warm robe, and traded it to Factor Gourelot for beads and gaudy silk threads.

With indescribable industry she worked moccasins and fire-bags; and these, too, won a small pittance of currency.

By the dim light of her poplar-wood fire the Ugly One toiled night after night beading a pair of beautiful moccasins for the boy as he slept.

It was a quaint little touch of sentiment for one so heavy of face as Mi-yah-tis. He was to know nothing of them until the day of his going; then his pride in their beauty would lighten the sadness of his heart at leaving his mother.

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE Mas-ki-sis and his mother waited for the steamer, hiding the horseshoe with the jealous care that a white owl takes over its two rounded eggs, Joe Descoigne's evil mind began to worry because of this same piece of lost iron. Horseshoes were not so plentiful but that if one were found near the scene of the horse-stealing talk might arise.

At last his fears goaded him into a journey over the trail in quest of the missing shoe. There was just a small chance that he might happen upon it; if an Indian had found it a plug of tobacco would induce him to part with his treasure. At any rate, a day in the saddle was nothing; so he rode his blue roan in the footsteps he had taken the time of the horse-stealing; but there was only the everlasting spread of tawny grass, devoid of the thing he sought.

The quest seemed so utterly hopeless, that Descoigne, after he had ridden a few hours, turned in the trail and made his way back to Fort Donald.

As he forded Otter Creek he saw a tepee. Per-

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haps it contained an Indian who had just come over the trail, and might have picked up the missing shoe.

He turned aside to the lodge, and calling at the door "Ho, nichie!" put his head through the loose flap, not knowing the Indian woman as Wolf Runner's squaw.

Bringing forth his tobacco, he filled his pipe and passed the plug over to the Cree woman; and all the time he was furtively searching every nook and corner of the lodge for the horseshoe.

As they smoked, Mi-yah-tis was exploring the visitor's face for the familiar something that told her she had seen him before.

Suddenly she remembered; a little catch in his voice brought it all back; he was Joe Descoigne, who had talked to Wolf Runner outside the tepee at Vermilion.

Yes, she had come from the way of Vermilion, the Ugly One said, in answer to Descoigne's query. No, her cayuse did not wear the iron shoes; for the Frenchman, with subtle strategy, was complaining that his horse was lame because there were no shoes in Fort Donald, neither good iron to make them. If she had two, or even one, he would give her much in trade for it—even if she had found an old one on the trail he would buy it.

At this Mi-yah-tis's heavy-browed eyes blinked

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with a sudden-startling-of thought. Her slow mind had seen nothing in the visitor's first request; now she knew. She felt like rushing to the hiding-place of Mas-ki-sis's iron clew to see if it were safe. Did this man, who being of Fort Donald was an enemy to Wolf Runner, know of their treasured possession?

Little Mas-ki-sis, coming up the path from the rabbit-runs in the creek flats, heard a strange voice as he reached the back of the lodge. He stopped and listened. Had his father, Wolf Runner, come back?

It was just then that Descoigne spoke of finding a horseshoe.

Mas-ki-sis's ear had been tutored to a fine discrimination in sounds; the rustle of a leaf, the whispering of the wind, the call of an animal were all translatable messages to him; so, when the man's voice filtered through the tepee-wall he knew it was the same that had threatened him with death at the horse-stealing.

He crouched in the silver-leaved wolf-willow and waited for the stranger's going. Presently Descoigne, convinced that the iron he sought had not been found, came from the tepee, mounted his blue roan, and rode away.

Mas-ki-sis, hugging the earth, wormed his small body to a spot whence he could watch the fa-

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miliar-voiced man. Yes, surely it was the same who had held him as they walked to the horses that night. Yes, that was the way the horse-thief sat the saddle—riding with one long stirrup, his body tilted to the left, and an arm held high in balance.

Many men rode that way, but not *just* that way; there was a something he could swear to, as he could tell the rolling gait of one bear from another.

When the horseman had dipped over the hill rising out of Otter Creek the boy went in to Miyah-tis and told her what he had discovered.

"Yes, it is true, little Otter," the Ugly One answered. "Now you can tell the White Mother's Chief, who is at Fort Garry, that Joe Descoigne stole the horses."

"Will the White Chief believe the story of Mas-ki-sis?" the boy asked.

"The great White Mother loves her Indian children, and the Chief, who is at Fort Garry, is her husband, or perhaps it is only her son; and he is a great chief, and will know whether it is lies or truth when Mas-ki-sis tells him of Joe Descoigne and the horse-stealing. Yes, little Otter, it is good you go to Wolf Runner. I have spoken of the ways of the big fire-canoe, and anyone can go by giving the canoe ogama this money that

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they use to make trade. You will not be afraid, little Otter; you will be Mi-yah-tis's brave?"

"I will be a little afraid," Mas-ki-sis answered; "afraid of the fire-canoe, for does it not make a howl fiercer than any wolf, mother? Yes, Mas-ki-sis will be a little afraid; but am I not to bring Wolf Runner back, and will I not then be like a brave?"

"Yes," continued Mi-yah-tis, "it will not profit to speak of the iron here, for there is not one pale-face that is a friend to Wolf Runner. Even the one who is big and strong, like a great chief, and whose eyes were the color of little spring flowers that dwell in bunches——"

"That held me in his arms in the snow, mother?" queried Mas-ki-sis. "Bull Moose I call him."

"Yes, that moneas. And did not Wolf Runner become as a dog in the harness of his sled that he might reach to the fort in defeat of the little father? And did not he, your bull moose, bring the police and take Wolf Runner from his tepee? They are all evil, little Otter, and if they know we have the horseshoe they will take it, and Wolf Runner will come back no more."

CHAPTER XXVI

MALCOLM took a journey after the stolen horses. Word had come that they were at Horse Hills, which is the Mecca of all wandering cayuses; though the whyfor man knows not; some saying that a grass grows there sweet as that in the horse's heaven, and others holding to the belief that it is a flyless spot; but certain it is, that in the equine brotherhood these hills are of established repute.

Also Malcolm was admonished of big Sandy to visit the tepee of Wolf Runner to see if the boy had been found. And on the back of a pack-horse he carried a gift of bacon and tea for the woman of Wolf Runner. Besides, there was the other mission of which Sandy spoke to no one but Malcolm; he was to search for a horseshoe that might mate the one the father had purloined from the little shop of Felix Benoit, for Cameron had found in the blacksmith's shop the shoe he had surmised had been taken from Descoigne's blue roan.

Malcolm brought back the horses, and the information that Wolf Runner's squaw had struck her lodge and gone away.

One day, as Mi-yah-tis was ladling the for-

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ever-and-ever rabbit-stew from the big pot into a wooden bowl that Mas-ki-sis held in his little hands, the hoarse snort of the steamer's whistle startled her so that she let a portion of the bubbling liquid glaze her boy's hand.

Quick, quick, it was the fire-canoe! No time to eat. And yet, stay, her little Otter must not go hungry; perhaps nobody would offer him food till he came to the presence of the White Mother's son.

Even the boy's appetite, always present, was gone, frightened away by the shrill call that was at Fort Donald.

"Eat, my little Otter, eat, eat," the Cree woman crooned, as she made ready his wardrobe; which was a jacket, and the beautiful white and blue beaded moccasins with the triangle design and the little geometric squares—always four in a line—such beautiful moccasins as had never been seen. But not to put on just then; the mother would carry them wrapped in her head-shawl, and when they were come to the fire-canoe Mas-ki-sis would put them on, and nobody would have such beautiful moccasins as Wolf Runner's little boy. Even the great White Chief at Fort Garry would not have more splendid footwear. He would surely be pleased with little Mas-ki-sis when he saw the moccasins, and the horseshoe, and heard

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the true story. Then they would not hang the father—or perhaps he was only to be shot—but would send him back to his lodge, and they would all return to Vermilion and give to their friends a tea-dance. See, there in a little cassette Mi-yah-tis was already saving up tea out of the trade.

When the mother unwound many yards of cloth, and held in her big strong hand the dainty creation, the art thing in blue and white and green, that seemed impossible of such coarse fingers, Mas-ki-sis shouted for joy. Then he kissed the heavy face—on the forehead, and the labor-dimmed eyes, and the thick lips.

Would she bring the cayuse for Mas-ki-sis to ride? No? Well, come little Otter; and together, hand in hand, as they had trudged that other time, the broad-backed squaw and the little Indian boy took up the pilgrimage that led to the shrine of justice that was the great White Mother's officer at Fort Garry.

CHAPTER XXVII

BRUCE, the minister, was on the "Saskatoon." He had come down the river from the west on his way to Winnipeg.

Sandy Cameron had gone aboard to talk with him, begging that something might be done for Wolf Runner; for in the Scot's belief he was innocent. He was sure Descoigne was at the bottom of the horse-stealing, and spoke of the blue roan's missing shoe and the one he had in his possession.

Sandy had said good-by, and Bruce, looking over the rail, saw a heavy-faced squaw of generous size on the clay bank near the gang-plank gazing wistfully at the huge structure. Beside her stood a little Indian lad. There was nothing in the individuality of the squaw to arrest his attention; it was the moccasins that clad the boy's feet that caught the minister's eye. There was something pathetically incongruous in the sudden termination of ragged clothes, cut off, as it were, separated from the brown earth, by the dainty art dream of blended blue and white and green beads.

Bruce had inherited something of the barbaric

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art instinct that had caused his forefathers to evolve the Scotch tartans; also was he not forever and ever each day of his life trying to arrest in the minds of his nomadic charges just this sort of inconsistent prodigality? How like an Indian it was! Why did not the little lad go barefooted, and the mother put the value of the moccasins on his back in warm clothing? Probably he was even half-starved; he was certainly of an unreasoning thinness; and yet, there he stood in the soiling mud of the river-bank, his feet encased in gaudy covering that Bruce himself would gladly have purchased.

The minister had never seen quite such delicately treated bead-work—certainly not on the feet of a boy. Away to the south the Bloods and Peigans worked their beads like that, but all he had seen in the north had been crude in comparison.

As Bruce gazed upon the old squaw and the little boy, his heart full of an angry reproach because of her thriftless attention to display, a lesson came to him with the articulate force of two words that for ages have come down in crushing denunciation: "Thou Fool!"

There was a warning toot of the whistle, three deck-hands ran over the gang-plank to loosen the hawsers, and just then the Cree woman, that was

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wife to Wolf Runner, threw her big strong arms around the little lad, that was Mas-ki-sis, and folded him to her broad breast as though she would keep her little Otter there forever and ever; and down the wrinkled face, with its massive jaws, trickled rivulets of tears, and the boy's breath came in gasps, as though he swung, thorn-held, in the torture-circle of the Sun-Dance.

Then the big arms swung pendulous, and Mas-ki-sis stole up the gang-plank like a frightened hare. The tableau taught the wise man who was Bruce all the wondrousness of the parting gift of the little moccasins. All the mother had to give; the self-denial to buy the beads; the patient toil that at the end it might be all-beautiful; and the aftermath, the tug at her heart-strings and the tears.

Where the boy was going did not matter, he was going away—that was all in all to the mother.

Bruce lost himself for a minute in mental contemplation of the shattered fabric of his wise revilings. He was wakened by the bustle of somebody passing over the gang-plank, and the voice of Captain Ball exclaiming: "Them damn nichies make me tired! What does the ould squaw want? Does she think Winnipeg's round the first bend?"

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And the boy with the moccasins was being driven ashore.

Bruce ran up the steps to Captain Ball, who was near the pilot-house.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"That ould she-wolf of a nichie sendin' that kid aboard wit' half the price av his ticket to Winnipeg—that's what's the matter, sor."

"Couldn't you take him on?" asked the minister.

"To starve is it?" queried Ball, half-angrily.

"Whose ~~hair~~ is it—where's he going?" asked the minister.

"Faith the divil—I mane, beggin' your pardon, the Lord knows; an' he won't tell, nayther will the kid."

"Just hold her for a minute, Captain; I'll away down and have a talk with the squaw."

"It's all up," moaned Ball, in comic despair; "th' ould hag'll jest kid the preacher, he's that soft-hearted. An' if the rat wants to go to New York, Bruce'll send him."

The Scotch minister went over the gang-plank with energetic stride.

"What is it, nichie?" he said in Cree to the squaw.

As she raised her massive face, in which the small, yellow-tinged eyes looked insufficient, Bruce

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started, took a step forward, and, peering sharply at her, exclaimed: "You—you are wife to Wolf Runner—you are of his lodge?"

The impassive, expressionless face answered nothing at all, either in word or look.

"I say you are of Wolf Runner's lodge," repeated Bruce, almost crossly; "do you not hear?" Then softening, "Did you not make the hot soup for me when I was starved with the cold, good woman?"

The small eyes blinked like a turtle's.

"And am I not your friend? Come, tell me, what's the trouble? Will the boy be going to his father? If it is so, my poor woman, I will take him and bring him back again."

Still the Cree woman, first of all a suspicious Indian, gave no sign of confidence. Was not the speaker a paleface, friend to the moneas that had betrayed Wolf Runner? But Mas-ki-sis was a boy, and children, like animals, know their friends out of intuition, and he, speaking to his mother, said: "I am the son of Wolf Runner, who is a brave; neither did he steal the horses. I will be a brave, even as Wolf Runner is. Mas-ki-sis will go with the ogama to Wolf Runner. The ogama speaks not with a forked tongue, mother, for he, too, saved me when I was dead with cold. Yes, Mas-ki-sis will go."

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He held up his face, full of its brave confidence, and the mother, saying nothing, kissed him, and the little bead eyes were blurred out of all discerning.

"Now, Ogama," the boy said, grasping the Bruce's coat in his fingers, "Mas-ki-sis is ready. You will take him to Wolf-Runner, who did not steal the horses."

"What did I say?" cried Captain Ball, as the two came up the gang-plank. "The minister is a tenderfoot for these worthless divils av nichies. Cast off there, ye lubbers!"—Ball had been captain of a tug in New Brunswick—"take charge, Pilot! Damn the nichies!"

Then to himself he muttered, for his heart was really of an Irish softness, and he had heard Bruce say it was Wolf-Runner's boy: "Sure, if I'd knowed the little divil was an orphan, wit' his father in jail, I'd a took him mesilf."

Then the ponderous sturgeon-nosed steamer, with the full dignity of one of the great Company's possessions, glided down the Saskatchewan to Grand Rapids.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Cree woman grew more hopelessly drooped and squat as the steamer slipped down the rapid river. Even after it had rounded the point and disappeared, she still stood there solitary and alone, as though some faint hope clung to her that it might put about and return.

Nobody in the world had ever felt quite so alone as she did. When Wolf Runner had been taken away, there was still Mas-ki-sis; now he was gone, and there was no one.

Without speaking to anyone, without looking to right or left, with her head low hung, she plodded back to the tepee that was like the willow-bluff at Vermilion where they put their dead high on pole platforms. What she was to do she did not know; she had not even thought of herself up to that time; her one idea had been that little Mas-ki-sis must go with the horseshoe and bring Wolf Runner back.

For a day she sat in her lodge crooning a song of pity to Manitou. Once she went out and put more red cloth on the willows to propitiate the

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wicked spirits. But everywhere there were memories of Mas-ki-sis. There the little run-way he had come up by from the small tamarack muskeg that was the home of wapoos; and in the bank of the creek there were prints of his fingers where he had dug soft clay to make balls for his willow-withe-sling.

And his fish-weir just below the tepee—it was now full of suckers, that swarmed to the shallow water of the creek's side, eating the myriad black-bugs that came always every autumn.

Mi-yah-tis broke the weir, and the shoal of foolish suckers splashed away in affright, as though they escaped one who sought their flesh, that was now worthless in its softness.

On the smooth earthen floor of the lodge was a little pyramid of antelope knuckle-bones—Mas-ki-sis's jack-stones. Just there the lad used to sit and play jack-stones with her. Yes, even she, the Nokum, had played with him as though she were a girl.

The mother gathered up the rude bone play-things and rubbed them against her cheek, then she put them carefully away with the tea that was for the tea-dance at the home-coming of her brave.

And the old moccasins of the little boy—almost soleless through wear! How glad she was that she had made the new ones so beautiful. But the

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discarded moccasins, beyond value for use, were precious because Mas-ki-sis had run and laughed and gambolled in them, so they, too, were made of the treasure-hoard.

Presently the mother stopped in wonderment at her occupation; instinctively she was packing up—most certainly she was. Her poor tortured spirit was crying out like a caged bird for return to Vermilion, to the home that had been hers with Wolf Runner and Mas-ki-sis. It was a good thought. ~~In the morning she would take the cayuse and~~ travois to Vermilion. She must take the horse back to Calf Shirt—she had not meant to keep it so long. She would wait at Vermilion for the coming of Wolf Runner, for the trail from Fort Garry came near to that place.

While the Cree woman's mind was filled with the tremendous responsibility of gathering together the few things that were the household gods of the father, and the little boy, and herself, the loneliness that was in her heart was subdued; but by and by, in the hours when wapoos scurries over the run-ways, and the owl blinks with solemn satisfaction on the darkened earth, she rested, bereft of toil, and Misery came and sat at the fire-side, and mocked her till she cried aloud in anguish after the foolish manner of Indian women who love their children more than sleep. Her wail



Her wail was like, that of a she-wolf.



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was like that of a ~~she~~ wolf's, hideous in its discordant lack of control. The barbaric lament wandered up the spruce forest that filled the valley of Otter Creek, and started a pack of ever-ready coyotes into vociferous echo.

Even to Fort Donald the night-wind carried the pibroch of these prairie-wolves, and the train-dogs howled back a derisive challenge, till the dwellers relapsed from all hope of sleep. The vibrant pain in the pagan heart of an old squaw had spread its troubled influence over the beasts of the forest and the men of the town. Such is the force of animate sympathy. Surely the dirge of little Mas-ki-sis's going was of extent, and equal unto his endeavor.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON the steamer Minister Bruce sought to draw the little Indian waif out of his shy timidity. In the tepee of his mother he had been brave enough at thought of the pilgrimage to his father; but now, listening to the fierce throb of the giant wheel, the harsh commands of the pilot; the swirl of rushing rapids; seeing a cordon of white faces close-drawn about him, and set in the white faces eyes that peered at him as though they would discover his secret—see beneath his cloth jacket and thin print shirt the worn iron shoe that hung from his neck by a cord of shaganappi, he became as shy as a trapped fox-cub. Even with Bruce he was not communicative. Had he not promised his mother that only to the Great Ogama at Fort Garry would he tell the name of the horse-thief—only to him would he show the evidence that no one could doubt? Yet he trusted this friend; his mother had said that all the palefaces spoke lies, but that was because she did not know this ogama who had saved him from death in the blizzard, and was taking him to Wolf Runner when the others had driven him from the fire-canoe.

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But Mi-yah-tis was wise; she was old, and wisdom came only with age, and he would hold true to her commands. He would say nothing of the horseshoe, even to this white man who was his friend.

But Bruce learned from the boy that he meant to find his father and go with him to the Governor to tell the Big Chief that Wolf Runner did not steal the horses.

The minister knew the Indian would be in Stony Mountain jail, a dozen miles from Winnipeg, so the boy's hopes were impossible of attainment. But he would himself take Mas-ki-sis to the Governor, for it was this official the squaw had conjured into a son or husband of the Great White Mother.

At Winnipeg Bruce had the boy lodged in comfort, and, having secured an audience with the Governor, took little Mas-ki-sis before the great official.

The minister acted as interpreter, for the Governor was not versed in Cree. This seemed a direct intercession of Providence, for it gave the lad confidence, and he told his story to Bruce with a simple directness that carried conviction beyond the possibility of the most powerful eloquence. It was just as the Cree woman had named it, the true tale of the horse-stealing.

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When Mas-ki-sis came in his narrative to the finding of the horseshoe, and brought it forth from beneath his jacket, Bruce cried out in astonishment, for he knew big Sandy had the other link in this peculiar chain of evidence. And when the Governor had this collateral from the minister's lips, he was convinced beyond doubt.

Strangely enough, the beautiful moccasins had appealed to him. Once he had spoken in a lull of the talk, and asked of their origin. "Mi-yah-tis, who is Mas-ki-sis's mother, made them," the boy answered; and the Governor, speaking to Minister Bruce, said: "People who love such beautiful things as these can't be all bad. People who are horse-thieves and depraved are beyond the power of art. The boy must have a good mother; nor does he speak as though he lived in an atmosphere of lies."

Also Bruce told of the blizzard, and how Wolf Runner had cast himself into the dog harness, out of gratitude, and hung true to them even to the gates of Fort Donald. Perhaps that was why Joe Descoigne, out of revenge, had sought to throw all the villany upon the Indian's friendless head.

The Governor had a son of the age of Mas-ki-sis, and though in justice that should have had no bearing on the case, perhaps it did intrude the

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father into what should have been a stern, inexorable administrator of the law.

At any rate, Wolf Runner was brought under guard the next day from Stony Mountain jail and questioned. If Bruce had not been there he might have preserved the sullen silence with which he had suffered for the crime of someone else; but when the minister told him he was there as a friend to set him free, he spoke.

Was not he the wronged one? As he tracked a bull-moose in the forest, had not the redcoats come and stolen away his little Mas-ki-sis—his son, whom he loved even as the white men loved their children; had not the mother wept, and moaned, and cried that her little Otter was dead? And then the police had come back without the boy, speaking the silly lie that he had stolen their horses. Then they had taken him from his lodge, and cast him into the prison at Stony Mountain, even as the Company had always done with trappers who traded not with them.

When Wolf Runner had ceased speaking, the Governor, turning to his orderly, said: "Bring in Mas-ki-sis, the little boy with the beautiful moccasins."

And when the lad was brought and led to Wolf Runner, the Governor, and Bruce, the minister, even the orderly, who was a sinful soldier, must

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needs turn their backs and busy themselves with some little matter that could not wait another instant. The Governor's nose needed a furious blowing—a persistent attention of handkerchief; even a sudden cold got into his eyes and watered them. It was something in the street that called Minister Bruce to the window—such an engrossing something. And where the man who had been thought a horse-thief stood, there was a noise as though a tigress had found her lost cub.

Mas-ki-sis whispered to Wolf Runner that it was the minister ogama who had brought him, the ogama beside whom Wolf Runner had lain the cold night of the blizzard.

When Bruce turned from the window, because the Governor had coughed three times, the Indian held out his hand and said: "My people say that Manitou made all the gray-eyed palefaces with forked tongues and bad hearts, but that is a lie."

Bruce took the Indian's hand in his own big Scotch paw, and the Governor coughed again, nodding his head in approbation.

But the accused man must remain under guard for a little yet, for there was the sending to Fort Donald of a police patrol to bring down big Sandy with his horseshoe, and Joe Descoigne with irons of a different shape on his wrists—even the blue

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roan of Descoigne's must be brought, that the shoes might be fitted and the evidence completed.

And when all this was done, the Frenchman, who was the true horse-thief, went to Stony Mountain for three years, and Wolf Runner was to go back with Bruce to the heavy-faced squaw who waited in the empty lodge at Vermilion.

CHAPTER XXX

GOVERNOR HODGE had the Englishman's faith that a boy untutored of masters was of little use in the world; white, red, or black, what mattered the color—education was the thing. His own offspring, who was the age of Mas-ki-sis, was then at Harrow, in England, receiving allopathic doses of instruction.

The beautiful blue and white moccasins of Wolf Runner's son somehow instilled into the Governor's mind an idea of violent incongruity between their wearer and an untutored life in the forest. Mas-ki-sis most certainly ought to be educated in a knowledge of the white man's lore. So, before the Reverend Bruce left Winnipeg, the Queen's Executive discussed with him the same matter.

The minister was not so sure that it would be a good thing for Mas-ki-sis. He had a huge understanding of things, had the Scotchman. In his mind lurked many quaint, not altogether definitely perfected ideas that the Lord, in His creative wisdom, had formed all objects, animate and inani-

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mate, to a preconceived end; his experience had taught him that the farther removed the Indian was from the white man, the happier and better he was.

This was somewhat anomalous, considering his own mission, and seemed to cast a distinct reflection of uselessness upon the crusade of his Church. But, in reality, Bruce held this view only as relating to the forest Indians; there was still a wide field of endeavor for him. The half-breeds and Company's Indians, who, by virtue of their occupation, were always subject to the contaminating influence of the white man, with his whiskey and his diseases and his immorality, was a field populous enough, needful enough of moral supervision from the Church.

Mas-ki-sis was undoubtedly a pure-blood Indian, and in the Bruce's mind it was a question whether he would not be better left to his Manitou worship and the forest life that would at least bring him to a physical manhood. But the Scot's priesthood forbade him putting it strongly to the Governor in this light; it would be like turning away a soul from its chance of salvation. At least it would appeal in that way to Governor Hodge, who was strong on questions of Church infallibility and the utility of civilized training. In fact, the Governor was a forceful man, unaccustomed to

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being crossed. He had taken an unusual liking to the Indian boy—had already determined to better his condition. Of course, that meant that the betterment would be along lines of his own conception.

The English Governor knew nothing of the world of simple love—which filled the heavy-faced Cree woman's heart at Vermilion. Even if he had known, it is not likely he would have allowed crude sentiment of that sort to deflect the manifest destiny of the surprisingly bright boy.

"We'll put Mas-ki-sis to school at St. John's," he said to the Bruce—and he spoke not in a tone of consultation—"and, if I mistake not, the boy will yet make a strong lieutenant to the Good Cause. We'll make a Christian of the little pagan; and he will go back to his own people and save many a soul."

"I'm afraid it will go hard with Wolf-Runner, Your Excellency; he's much attached to the lad. I hardly think he'll consent."

The Governor smiled in amusement; this simple-minded Scotchman spoke as though it were a matter between two Indians. He was there as Governor to these children of the plains, and to decide what was best for them; he stood in the shoes of their great White Mother:

But the official was also a diplomat, not given to useless expressions calculated to wound any

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man's sensibilities; so he answered with evident sincerity; "Yes, yes—of course, of course; we must win over the father—we must explain to him fully that it is for the boy's good. These simple tepee dwellers have really a very keen worldly sense, and we might give Wolf Runner a hint—they are quick to resentment, childishly so—just a hint, that, with his son in our protection, his own outlook will be better."

"Yes," concurred the minister, "we must send Wolf Runner back satisfied. The boy's mother is eating her old heart out for the lad, I'm afraid."

Governor Hodge arched his eyebrows slightly, and stole a furtive look at the other's face. Did the Scotchman really believe this sort of thing? It seemed an idea of extreme grotesqueness that an Indian, or even more so, a squaw, should have a troubled heart over anything but food or work or killing.

The dissimilarity of belief of which the two men were possessed was entirely of environment. Governor Hodge knew his Indians out of literature; while Bruce had broken bread with them, had slept by the same camp-fire, and had read a little in their hearts. His knowledge, perhaps, was greater; but the other's authority was supreme. So the Governor's way was the way. Mas-ki-sis remained

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at school in St. John's, and Wolf Runner went back with the Bruce to Vermilion.

The Indian's heart was heavy over parting with the boy; but had not the Governor loosed him from a living death, sent him back to his Mi-yah-tis and his forest-life?—Surely that was something.

And when they came to Vermilion, to the lonely Cree woman waiting in the skin tepee, it had all to be talked over and made soft to her understanding, and the goodness of the White Mother's agent enlarged upon.

And she, though in her heart was the wail of Hagar, took comfort and strength, because Bruce Ogama, who had twice saved Wolf Runner, and had also warmed Mas-ki-sis in the death-snow, said it was good. Also Wolf Runner was satisfied, so what mattered her loneliness? All her life she had lived in an atmosphere saturated with the preponderating man interest. It was an occasion such as the making of a brave—to be withstood without lament.

Bruce arranged it that Wolf Runner was given employment at Fort Donald.

That Mas-ki-sis had come into the Governor's favor had effect even with the factor; also, in the way of reparation, something was due to the Indian.

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In addition, because of the happening to Descoigne, Wolf Runner was given, with voluminous unstint, a full measure of silent hatred by Felix Benoit and the adherents of Descoigne.

The Indian drove dogs for the factor, packed furs, and ranged the forest for fresh meat. He and Mi-yah-tis lived in their tepee on the squaw's old camping-ground at Otter Creek.

With the peculiar nomadic instinct that is possessed of the red man, several families had migrated from Fort Donald proper to Otter Creek, and the place had attained to the glory of an Indian village.

All through the winter the Cree woman nursed her loneliness, and fulfilled the mission of her life, which was work. In the little poplar bluff that had been swept by fire till the slim, straight-growing aspens stood barkless and silver-white in the dry air, she cut billets of wood for the camp-fire. She took Mas-ki-sis's rabbit-snares and set them in the old run-ways he had known in the autumn, and brought meat to the larder of her lord.

When he had satisfied the hunger, which was like unto that of a cormorant, with the rabbit saddle, or the breast of a bird, or whatever else was choice and sweet to the tooth, she, too, would, from the rejected, take sustenance, that her strength might remain for the work.

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Outwardly, her life was as æsthetic as the existence of a ground-hog; inwardly, humanly, deep-guarded by an exterior of heavy-faced restraint, her poor old heart talked incessantly of Mas-ki-sis, and strove with crude incapacity to picture him in the school of the ogamas.

Sometimes, when Wolf Runner was away, she would bring forth the antelope knuckle-bones, and, squatted on the earth-floor, play "jack-stones" with a fancy-created Mas-ki-sis; chide him when, because of some trick of his, she would lose one of the yellow bones. Sometimes she laughed at him and called him pet names; her little Otter—her sleek, fat little Otter. Then the bones would be put away; and, with her red-stone pipe filled with tobacco and kinnikinick, the dried inner bark of the red willow, she would sit and smoke, and talk to Mas-ki-sis, who was at her side; perhaps, even, she could feel his little fingers warm and soft in her own big gnarled hand, that was horn-crusted because of the axe-handle, and the skin-scraping moose-bone.

She had an art-treasure, a cabinet of rare antiques, a little wooden cassette filled with all that had belonged to Mas-ki-sis. His blow-pipe, a hollowed alder; his horse-hair snares; his snake-stick; his little snow-shoes; the willow bow with the feathered arrows; a horse-hair fish-line, with bent

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nail for hook; even the old moccasins, made sacred by the holes his eager toes had worn: all these were in the cassette, to be overhauled every day of the long winter.

The Cree mother even made a little manikin from birch-bark, a marionette Mas-ki-sis—a miniature embodiment of her heart's delight. And because of this harmless toy, which was nothing, a tragic happening came down the trail of Fate and lodged in the tepee of Wolf Runner.

In Otter Creek village was the medicine-nokum, Nistas. She was mother to the wife of Felix Benoit. Now the Evil One has no jurisdiction in any community unless he acquires a human agent; and years before—it was at the time of the nokum's birth—the Devil, casting about for a naturally endowed worker, chanced upon Nistas.

In semblance to humanity her beauty was on a par with that of Mi-yah-tis—she was just as ugly; but inwardly, in all of Dante's Inferno, there were not two spirits more unlike.

The first manifestation of Nistas's activity was conjugal trouble.

Now, there is this in truth in an Indian's manner of life: if anything happens, for good or for evil, it is of medicine-making, and of the interference of

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spirits. Natural causes and hygienic punishments are beyond the-pale of his understanding.

So, when Baptiste Lerocq, the half-breed, discovered that his wife was absent-minded, to say the least, in her affection, he declared that somebody had made medicine against him—had cast a spell over Suzette until she preferred David Monkman, whose neck he could most certainly twist—a Monkman was no man at all. But instead of twisting the favored one's neck, Lerocq sought for the instigator of his matrimonial troubles—the one who made medicine against him and his household.

Mischief, or the rumor of it, always propagates with frightful rapidity in a small colony; so the very air of Otter Creek village, even into Fort Donald, was electric with a sense of evil emanating from some medicine-worker. It may have been chance or fate, or this contagious something, but in the space of one moon three families were as entirely disrupted as though they had been slaves in the galley of fashion.

The little father who sometimes came among them had for years besought these people to abstain from internal strife. "Love each other, children," he had admonished them. Bruce's sermon on the animating spirit of love was also not many moons back in their memory; yet one oblique-

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minded squaw, devoid of human responsibility, trading on their belief in the efficacy of medicine-making, had set them all at each other's throats.

Nistas had the full conviction of the power of her craft; she really believed that the happy saturnalia of infelicity was fostered by her crooning chants and her magic working.

But retribution was brewing for somebody. It was Felix Benoit who spoke of this in the hearing of Nistas. Even Felix himself had an idea as to who was making the medicine—it was the she-bear that was Wolf Runner's squaw.

Felix was rich in figurative vocabulary; also he, and all the others who had been athirst—devoid of fire-water since the crusade of big Sandy, bore malice against the house of Wolf Runner.

Wicked old Nistas was quick to the opportunity. Surely it was Wolf Runner's squaw. Had not all the family feuds originated since her coming from Vermilion? Most certainly it was that forest-dweller, Mi-yah-tis, the Ugly One. Was not Wolf Runner of the Miteo, the sect of evil repute?

Like a prairie-fire started from the spark of a flint that falls in dry grass, this new satanic thing swept through the village with secret force.

Nistas sought to catch Mi-yah-tis at the medi-

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cine-making; and the Cree woman's glorious affection for Mas-ki-sis, sweet and pure as the prairie-flower's drinking of night-dew, made this design possible.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was spring by now. For months the sun had just topped the hills to the south, cutting for a few hurried hours across the sky as though he feared Wic-sah-ke-chack, who shot his bolts of Northern Lights athwart the arched vault. But now, ever encroaching on the citadel of frost, the north, the sun climbed higher and higher each day, and coaxed forth by his gentle warmth the yellow-gold offerings of pea-vine and the fringed crown of dandelion, and the slender stalk of prairie-sunflower that by and by would star the earth like a mirrored sky. Close-nestling in new-grassed turf, like sapphire jewels or angel's eyes, the violets peeped in timid joyousness.

And it was through all this sweetness of creation that Nistas stole like a serpent to the tepee of Wolf Runner. If she went by the little path to the back, and around the side, and suddenly in at the flapping door, perhaps she might see something; if she did not, it was only a visit, and her sudden advent would be nothing; no one ever knocked at a tepee door. If she saw nothing of

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the medicine-making, she could come again, many times, and at all hours. She might even listen close to the skin walls sometimes.

But the influence of Nistas's master, who was the Evil One, was paramount, and as she thrust her yellow face with his sign-manual upon it through the door, Mi-yah-tis was crooning to the little manikin that was Mas-ki-sis.

As the shadow thrown from the doorway fell across the day-dreamer's lap, she looked up in affright and into a pair of small eyes that were bright with the vindictive cunning of a wolverine. The birch-bark Mas-ki-sis was secreted, though Mi-yah-tis knew the wicked Nistas, staring at her from the sunlight, had seen it.

Even from Wolf Runner the mother had kept this holy thing, this sweet communion with her little Otter, and now there were the eyes of Nistas peering into her bared heart—Nistas who was wicked, and of the lodge of Felix Benoit.

The medicine-worker stepped inside and talked with the other woman, calling her sister; even sought to draw the mother of Mas-ki-sis into tales of medicine-making, that she might tell to the others that the Ugly One boasted of her power for evil.

But beyond her fancied communion with the boy, Mi-yah-tis was as devoid of imagination as a

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badger, as materialistic as a sand-hill crane. Mas-ki-sis was the loadstone that drew her out of her slave-like life of utility; apart from him she found the problem of wood-chopping and skin-tanning and bead-working a tax of huge magnitude upon her limited mentality.

So Nistas was forced to fall back upon her own evil imagination for tales of condemnation. But she was capable; also had she not seen the wife of Wolf Runner making medicine? Had not the Cree woman sought to hide it from her, frightened by the sudden discovery?

The case was too clear; the needed link had been forged in the chain of evidence; an actual eye-witness of the squaw's deviltry obtained.

The superstitious Indians and half-breeds became like a colony of bees that had suddenly discovered an enemy in their midst. They planned a most emphatic project of disapprobation for the Cree woman; but, as it happened, the sweet influence of Mas-ki-sis, that seemed so visionary and unreal, saved her from their troublous attention.

For days, even weeks, the mother had been possessed of an idea that her little Otter was ill—that he was calling to her night and day. When she brought forth the little jack-stones and coaxed him into an unreal presence (all imaginative), he would sit huddled up, with his big black eyes pleading to

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her from a thin, pinched face. She had spoken to Wolf Runner, saying that Mas-ki-sis was ill, and that she must go to him.

And Wolf Runner had answered: "Nichimous, you are feeling long (which is the Indian expression for lonesome)—you are feeling long because you hear not the voice of our little Otter. Wolf Runner, too, would like to see his brave. Perhaps when it is warm, and there is a ration of sweet-grass for the cayuse on the trail, we will go to Fort Garry where is Mas-ki-sis."

And it happened that when Wolf Runner came to the tepee at sundown the day Nistas had looked through the slitted door, Mi-yah-tis begged with vehemence that they go to Fort Garry.

Next day, laying in food for the journey, Wolf Runner and his squaw trailed to the south, and the wrath that was maturing in the village was robbed of its victim.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN the villagers knew of the going, Nistas cried: "Did I not say Mi-yah-tis was afraid? Because I have seen her medicine-making she has gone away, and now we shall have peace."

And many of them were glad, because if they killed the Cree woman—and surely they would have done so—the meddlesome redcoats, which were the police, would perhaps come and seek to punish them for their administration of justice. But if the wife of Wolf Runner came back again to their village, then—ah! but she would not; for, as Nistas said, she was afraid.

Wolf Runner had become possessed of a cayuse and Red River cart, a vehicle which is a class in itself, a very Ark in antiquity of design. A wondrous structure, guiltless of iron, and held together by rawhide cord, which is shaganappi. Even the wheels wore not tires, and in their hubs was a voice discordant as a long-throated loon's.

For three weeks the dry wooden axles, athirst for lubricants, wailed tremulously as the Cree and his squaw journeyed over the sun-kissed prairie

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that was sweet from the perfumed breath of awakened flowers and sedge-grass and mint and endless sage. As they passed, a solemn little cavalcade, myriad gophers sat erect, like picket-pins, and stared in wonderment at the two humans.

The Cree woman was entirely oblivious of the fierce denunciation that attached to their memory at Otter Creek; she knew nothing of the accusation against her. When they made camp, she untangled the hungry cayuse from the intricate maze of crude lashings that attached him to the cart, hobbled his forefeet, and then passed to her household duties. Wolf Runner, exhausted by the arduous rôle of a brave, rested and smoked his kinikinick.

And, so going, the two came to Fort Garry; and, like children, by tortuous questioning, found their way to the mission school at St. John's, in which was Mas-ki-sis.

And Mas-ki-sis *was* ill. The ether-waves, or whatever it was of telepathy, or perhaps it was only a mother's heart-sore misgiving, were the truth.

The Cree mother saw him just as she had conjured him in the tepee at Otter Creek, thin-faced and large-eyed. If she could have seen the school-room set out in rows of human atoms, like the onion-beds of a garden, and have breathed for a

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hour the stifling, exhausted air that had been sucked empty of all oxygen, she, perhaps, out of instinct, might have known how he had been smitten. The windows, closed tight against the life-giving prairie-wind, were like walls of the Inquisition. But she saw nothing of these things, knew nothing of them, just found her little Otter a stricken wreck on his small iron cot. And her foolish old voice quavered, and her little eyes, that were like bear's eyes, became dim; and she all but fell to her knees as she crouched over him, and laid her cheek, that was the color of buckskin, against his gaunt face.

Wolf Runner stood erect, frowning; his spirit tortured behind a stoical reserve, which was the proper composure of an Indian in the presence of a hated paleface.

Mas-ki-sis had no complainings; nothing but the plaint: "Take me back to my home at Vermilion."

To him Vermilion—which was but a grassless circlet where the tepee of his childhood had stood near the great muskeg—was the sweetest place in all the world. Lying there on the iron cot with eyes shut, he had pictured the great cotton-wood that shaded the lodge, and had heard the tinkling bell-like song of the starlings that used to come in families, and blink-blink-blink to the sun as it

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dipped in the west beyond the great muskeg. Even the solemn strut of the drab-coated cow-bird was more pleasing than the incessant antics of a canary that homed in a wire cage down in the matron's room.

And in the night-time at Vermilion how often he had answered the whip-poor-will, and had hooted back in mockery at the solemn owl? And in the spring-time he had listened with a thrill of delight to the whistling whirl of the birds of velocity—the ducks, as they sped to the Northland. And in autumn the bugle-voiced swans, high in air; and a little later the “A honk-honk, a-honk!” of the gray goose wedging the night, had told him of swirling snow in the Rockies that drove him southward. And perhaps the next night it would be the shriller cry of the waveys.

And there were pictures of the feathered moss in the great muskeg, coral-beaded by the red berries of the Indian's tea-plant. And there, too, in the hollows where ran little streams, hung the clusters of dark pearls, the black currants, that were sweet to the taste of the crested partridge.

There was a thirst upon him that water seemed not to prevail against. If he could but wander, like a little bear-cub amongst the saskatoon bushes, and eat of the luscious blue-bloomed berries that

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the Great Spirit had made dear to the heart of every Indian, and of a great abundance, perhaps the parched feeling would pass from his throat. In another month the saskatoons would fruit, and he begged to go back to the Northland.

"Your little boy has a bad cold," the matron said, speaking through an interpreter; and her eyes flashed searchingly over the physique of Wolf Runner for a flat chest that might have lent a lung weakness to the little one. "For many days he has had a cold; he seems to catch cold so easily. No, it is not our fault."

"It is the fault of Mas-ki-sis," the boy added, for in the face of his father was the look the Cree braves wore at the Sun-Dance.

Wolf Runner answered the interpreter: "Mas-ki-sis is stricken with a sickness. It is not good for Mas-ki-sis to dwell in the lodge of the pale-face—Mas-ki-sis will go back to the lodge of Wolf Runner."

The father's speech was simple and awkward, and direct; for the way of an Indian is to suffer with few words.

It was not difficult to get consent for the lad's removal; even the superintendent of the school could understand that there was little profit to anyone in civilizing an Indian if he died in the process. It usually turned out that way, this misdi-

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rection of the Creator's intentions; but until the death-seal was set manifest on the victim, there was always a fatuous belief that persistent endeavor would correct this inconsiderate habit of Nature.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN two days Mas-ki-sis started back to the Northland in the wooden cart that sang in his ears a requiem. Before leaving, the matron told the lad that he must be very careful of his health. He hadn't any, really; the smothering school-room had taken it all from him as a vampire drains its victim; but the matron, thinking not of the incongruity, gave him many wise words of useless import, and divers bottles of drugs that were as efficacious, almost, as the streamers of red cloth Mi-yah-tis had tied to the willow wands at Otter Creek.

It may be that the scourge had aged Mas-ki-sis into a wise tenderness, for he asked the matron to tell not to his mother that he had the lung sickness—it would cause her unrest; and surely he would get strong again when he went back to the spruce and the birch, and drank of the wind that came through the sweet-smelling sage, and had not the hours of toil over strange books.

As they journeyed, Mi-yah-tis told Mas-ki-sis

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why it was that his strength had gone from him—it was because of Nistas. The mother had seen it in the wicked eyes of the medicine-worker as she gazed upon the little birch manikin, that was Mas-ki-sis, that day at Otter Creek.

The boy nodded his head approvingly; this belief would keep Mi-yah-tis from asking questions that must be answered with evasion. Besides, his mother knew many charms and medicines that would stop the evil influence of Nistas; she would be happy thinking he would soon grow strong again. Therefore he answered: "Yes, someone is making medicine against me—perhaps it is Nistas; or perhaps it is the bear that Wolf Runner killed. The wolves got the head because I did not put it on the tree so that the spirits of the woods might not be angry. Wolf Runner told me to put the head of muskwa on the lone pine at Vermilion, but I forgot."

Each day the Cree woman's heart shed a little of its despair, for the panacea that was of Heaven, the prairie-wind, balm-laden because of the herbs and the flowers, crept deeper and deeper into the lungs of Mas-ki-sis till it reddened the thin blood a trifle, and he grew stronger.

Wolf Runner was sullen in his bitterness against the palefaces. Though Mas-ki-sis could move about, all the elasticity of youth had gone from his

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sinews, and he was like a willow bow that had lost its spring.

The Indian was even angered against the boy, or rather impatient of his uselessness. Mas-ki-sis, who was to have been a brave, a mighty hunter, a tireless tracker of mooswa, was now but a squaw child. In vain the mother clapped her big scrawny hands in delight, and called the father's attention to every little symptom of improvement in the boy's condition.

At every camping-ground she put out the propitiating streamers of red cloth. She even spared from their meagre commissariat offerings of food to the spirits, which were promptly purloined by the pair of whiskey-jacks that had cast in their fortunes with them.

Mas-ki-sis had shouted with delight at the first shrill piping note of these thievish jays. That was the first day out from Winnipeg; whiskey-jack was an old friend, a part of the boy's woodland life.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NEVER was there such a fight against the grim destroyer.

In the heart of the Ugly One there was forever and ever the subdued cry of Hagar. If Wolf Runner had not been there, this wilderness of the west would have echoed with her cry of despair.

They trailed slowly, because Mi-yah-tis was always finding sweet water, or dry wood, or good camping-places with buffalo-grass loved of the cayuse, to the end that Mas-ki-sis should not tire from long drives.

When they came a little farther into the North-land, where the grass reached higher in its growth, Mas-ki-sis slept on beds that were like down. With strong love-hands the mother, going into the low meadows, plucked sweet-grass, and mint, and yarrow, and made a nest for her little Otter. Sometimes it was the feathery ends of spruce bows woven into the smoothness of cloth; and the incense of its balsam lulled him to sleep as though red poppies kissed his weary lids with opium lips.

In the school they had taught him from books

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of the true God—the God of the soul; and now he was back in the embrace of Pan, who was called Manitou. And while his little pagan mind groped fitfully in the dark over the hard lesson that was impossible of his solving until he fell asleep, the Ugly One sat beside his bed, and wondered if the bad medicine of Nistas's making had been broken by her charms.

Wolf Runner, who had a Company trade-gun, shot prairie-chicken and ducks; and the pilgrimage lay through Utopia. That was till they came to Little Beaver River.

It had rained back at the birthplace of Little Beaver, and he was a brawling, turbulent stream of muddy water.

Over the ford Little Beaver swirled in sullen sweeps, lashing at the clay banks.

Wolf Runner looked darkly at the crossing. Not often he hesitated because of difficulty; and there was neither feed nor wood nor anything to make it a place of good camping.

Then he took the ford, urging the reluctant cayuse with a heavy quirt. Half-way the water washed the animal's belly; the ford had shifted, and in the coffee-colored flood there was no sign whether it was up-stream or down-stream.

That it was gone demoralized the cayuse, and he tried to turn; this moved the cart back into

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deeper water, and the flood lifted it till its wheels beat a quivering tattoo on the bottom.

Mi-yah-tis raised Mas-ki-sis, and held him with one strong arm. They would be together, so be it they reached the other side; or even if they were claimed of the waters, they would still be together.

Wolf-Runner, in his cool wisdom, seemed apathetic, for he sat still, and waited for the return of the cayuse's wandering sense. One stroke of the quirt and the frenzied animal would twist them to destruction. The cart was carrying downstream; the water banked against its side was sweeping to their knees, and carrying off with a jubilant rush their goods. Now the cart floated, and the grasp of the stream on its upper side was sucking it down.

Wolf Runner called to the Cree woman, and they both leaned far over the other side. This was three seconds of doing.

While the cayuse had backed the cart himself in his affright, it seemed a proper horse thing to do; now something was pulling him back into the cold, depressing waters—it was the floating cart—and his obstinacy resented the interference. He plunged forward, and Wolf Runner cheered him. The cayuse actually swam, and the stream was rushing through the cart like a mill-race. Then the horse struck footing, and, splashing the churned

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waters like a paddle-wheel, he raced up the dip of the bank, and they were freed from the clutch of Little Beaver.

In the cart there was nothing but the humans, their blankets, and Wolf Runner's gun, which had been lashed to the rail; just these, and the copper tea-pail which swung by its bale from a stake. The blankets were on the seat, anchored by their weight. Little Beaver had failed of their lives, but had sucked into his voracious maw their food and all else.

The Indian looked ruefully at his looted vehicle; most paramount was the loss of the commissariat. He had his gun. A grunt of despair escaped him; his gun powder-horn, even the bag of shot and tin of powder that had been with the other supplies, were now soaking somewhere in the muddy waters of Little Beaver.

Instinctively the Indian thrust his hand into the beaded fire-bag that hung from his belt; his fingers touched a box of matches, and he drew a deep breath of relief. It was a mitigation of the disaster. Also there was his tin box of gun-caps — glinting baubles with no powder for the gun.

Disclaiming all responsibility, the erratic cayuse plucked complacently at the prairie-grass.

Mi-yah-tis was still clutching the little boy con-

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vulsively; his presence safe, sank into insignificance the prospect of hunger. Her life had been composed of alternate seasons of starvation and rich feeding; they would manage somehow.

Leaving the cart, Wolf Runner followed the downward sweep of the stream for a mile in search of wreckage.

One solitary piece of bacon rewarded his effort. On his return they pushed disconsolately along the trail.

That night their hunger absorbed the salvaged bacon. There was not even the usual waste of gravy for the supper of the birds, whiskey-jack, and his wife.

In the morning, like the children in the wilderness, they gazed upon a wide expanse of territory with eyes tense from the constrained longing of their stomachs. There was not even any cord or sinew to make a snare, or the hungry ones would have snatched many bead-eyed gophers from their holes. An evil chance had caused Wolf Runner to leave the buffalo-knife that usually hung at his belt in the cart that day, else he might have made a snare from his old shaganappi harness.

It was a mocking fate. On the earth ran much food, and in the air winged prairie-chickens and plover and sand-piper and curlew and ducks, yet they could do nothing but plod on, mile after mile,

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with the desolation of hunger over them, hoping that they might meet a chance traveller.

With squeaking complaints and astonished revilings the blue-gray whiskey-jacks upbraided the people that neither ate nor shared food with anyone. And at noon, when the humans sat silent and morose while the horse fed, whiskey-jack perched on the cart and peered down at them in deep disgust. He, too, would starve, following such a beggarly outfit.

When Wolf Runner's party started again, the jays, with shrill invective, deserted them.

"Whiskey-jack is going," Mas-ki-sis said to his mother; "he has flown away because we have no food. I wish I could fly to where there is eating—I am so hungry."

"Never mind, little one," Mi-yah-tis answered, "we will soon come to Egg Lake, where there are many nests of the mallard."

The mother knew that it would be quite two days before they would come to the ducks' breeding-grounds. Even then the eggs might all be hatched; but she tried to steel the boy's heart against the depressing hunger.

Just beyond their reach was food, delicious, limitless. They were like city paupers that gazed out of starved eyes through glass barriers that guarded stores of bread and meats.

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The saskatoon berries were of a tantalizing un-ripeness; the tall bushes were white with a plethora of uncolored fruit.

And little Mas-ki-sis's fevered mouth had set him dreaming of nights for the full-juiced saskatoons. Now he had come to them in unexpected want, and they mocked him.

CHAPTER XXXV

ALL that day Mi-yah-tis, driven to it by the pathetic hunger of her little pinch-faced Otter, was thinking of a sin against her gods. Ahead of them, close beside the trail, at the little stream of Towatano, rested Grass Head, the Cree. Grass Head was possessed of powder and shot, and other things which they had not; but Grass Head would never offer them a portion, for he was dead. For two moons he had slept the long sleep, peacefully cached high on the platform which was his bier; and on the posts of the cache were his gun, and the horns of powder and shot. He had been a minor chief, and his tribe had sent him well equipped over the long trail to the Happy Hunting Ground. The Cree woman had seen this cache of the dead on their way to Winnipeg; now she remembered with startling distinctness every detail. The tightly corked buffalo-horn would certainly be full of powder.

The Ugly One knew that her brave would die like a starved wolf rather than desecrate his tribes-

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man's grave; so would she, for the matter of that, but would not little Mas-ki-sis succumb before they—was not he dearer to her than the pleasure of the gods, the traditions of her people? For him could not she almost risk the anger of the guardian spirits of the air?

This was the evil act she pondered over as they travelled in the wailing, creaking cart through the land all beautiful.

At times they were in great lakes of blood-red waters—small seas of blood lilies, yellow-hearted and crimson-lipped.

Mas-ki-sis bathed his eyes, his face, with the flowers; he held them to his heart in rapture.

"Waugh! Little Brave!" cried Mi-yah-tis; "'tis right you love them. Manitou calls them to grow from the blood of the Cree braves who fell in battle. They are the flowers of bravery."

"I am not hungry," at once cried Mas-ki-sis; "I can wait till we come to the lake where are many nests."

"Huh! Little Otter, the red flowers breathe the spirit of the dead braves."

The sun was in the west as they passed Towatano and Grass Head's place of rest. It threw a sombre shade from the cache across the trail; and as its shadow darkened the eyes of Mi-yah-tis she shuddered.

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Wolf Runner, looking not at the bier, but with his eyes straight ahead along the trail, said, in a low voice: "A friend who is dead is of little use. If Grass Head were alive he would give Wolf Runner of his powder, for we are hungry."

When they had gone a little distance, the Ugly One asked Wolf Runner to make camp. But he wished to push farther from the spirit-haunted place where rested the dead Cree; so a little more of travel and he yielded to the squaw.

Never had the Indian been so helpless, so mocked at by the red gods of the chase. With a knife he could have done many things; he could have made a bow from the willow growing by the creek beds; he could have made a little figure-four deadfall for gopher; but his hands were as empty as a babe's and as helpless.

The cayuse, prime cause of the disaster, grunting in satisfaction as he fed, mocked their starvation. If they met no one on the trail—if they came to no nests with eggs—well, perhaps the sneering beast would attain to a new use.

As a dog might have done, Wolf Runner curled himself up to smother in sleep the yearning for food which was not.

Holding the boy's head on her lap, Mi-yah-tis watched for the slumbering of her husband.

"Sleep, little one," she said to Mas-ki-sis, draw-

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ing the blanket about him; "sleep your hunger away, little Otter, even as Wolf Runner does."

Then she moved to the other side of their camp-fire, covertly watching the boy. Yes, he, too, was at rest, she thought, and rising, stole away.

As the Ugly One slipped silently from the fire-light, the emptiness that was because of her going awoke the fitfully sleeping lad, and his eyes followed the movements of Mi-yah-tis. Now with long strides she was hurrying down the back trail.

Mas-ki-sis arose, and stepping with the lightness of a bird, followed. Clear of Wolf Runner he went faster. Presently he called, "Mother!"

"What is it, little one?" the mother asked, when he had reached to her side.

He put his hand in hers and answered: "I, too, am going to the sleeping Grass Head."

"Why do you talk of this thing, little Otter?" the squaw asked, marvelling.

"Mas-ki-sis saw Mi-yah-tis when her eyes were on the powder of Grass Head," he answered. "I will talk to Chief Grass Head, and tell him we are starving; and if the spirits are not angry, then you will take the powder and shot, mother, and together we will bring them back to Wolf Runner."

The little hand that was in the Cree woman's was warm and did not tremble, though hers that held it shook in fear.

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As they went forward to the abode of dread, the moonlight twisting their shadows into grotesque demons, the boy's presence comforted the Cree woman, who was sore afraid.

"It may bring evil to—" Mi-yah-tis checked herself. She was thinking of the red moon with its holding of trouble for Mas-ki-sis. "Manitou may be angry if we take the powder," she finished.

"The white teacher at the mission told me that when anyone died he went to God, which is Manitou, and did not need powder nor shot nor the gun. So do not be afraid, mother; Grass Head is not hungry, as we are, and will not be angry if we take his powder."

"It may be true, little one; but if the spirits call to us in anger we will go away, and leave the powder and remain hungry."

The four crotched posts of Grass Head's cache stood black in the uncertain moonlight, looking like Indian sentinels guarding the dead chief.

The two, mother and son, had come to it silently, the spirit fear that was over them hushing the clamor of their tongues. They were standing in the trail gazing with awe upon the death-temple they were about to desecrate.

"Ho, Chief Grass Head!" called Mas-ki-sis from where he stood in the trail; "Wolf Runner and Mi-yah-tis and Mas-ki-sis, who are of

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your people, are starving. The River Spirit has taken the food from Wolf Runner and we are hungry. O Chief! give us of your powder, that Wolf Runner may make a kill of many birds. Be not angry, Grass Head, for we are hungry."

Where had the little one got all this wisdom, Mi-yah-tis was asking herself; surely the spirits of the air would take pity on Mas-ki-sis, who was but a child.

"Come, mother," the boy said; "see, Grass Head is not angry."

Hesitatingly, the woman and the boy stepped from the trail to where the horns of powder and shot hung.

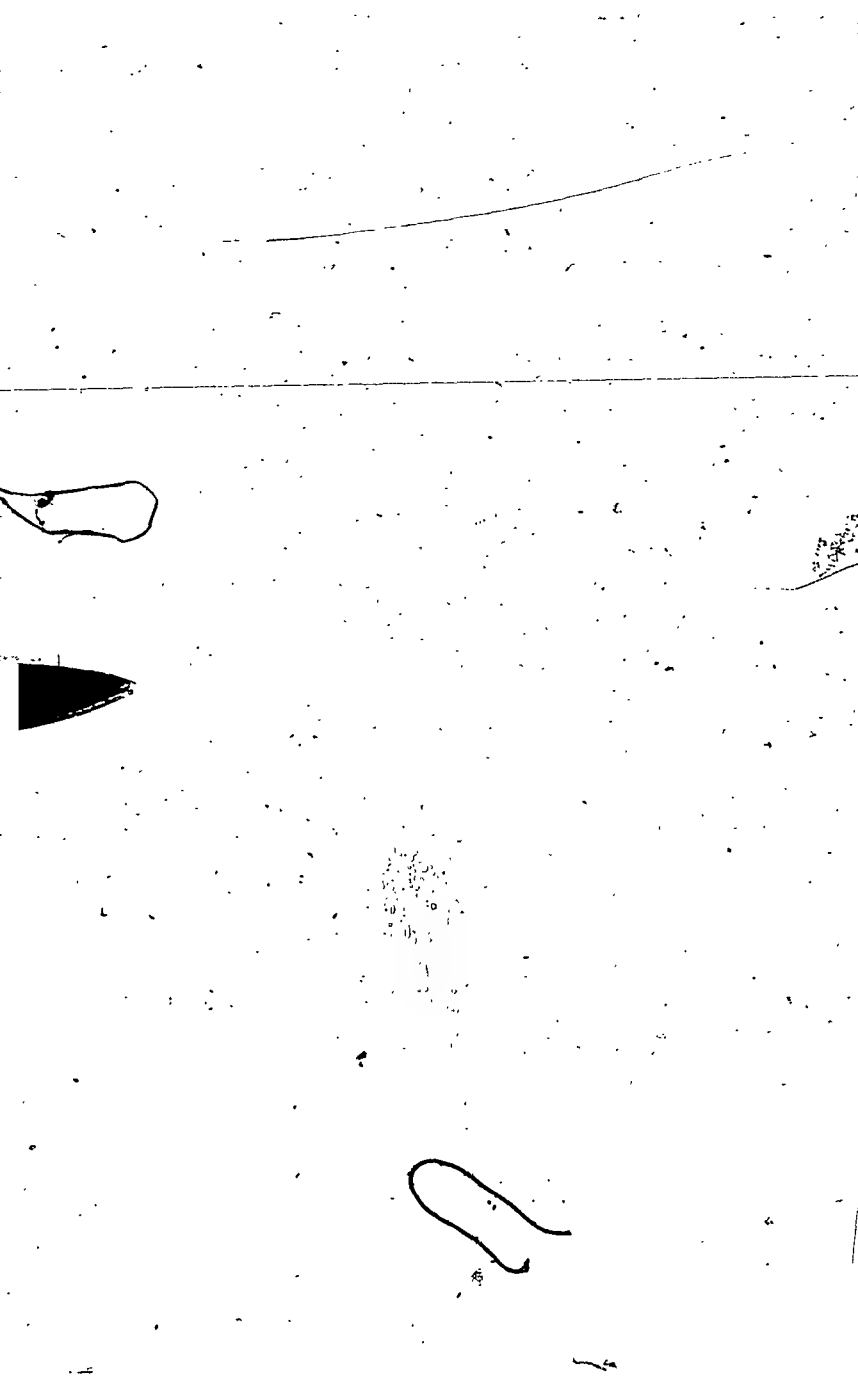
As Mi-yah-tis stretched her big arm upward for the black dust of desire, Mas-ki-sis was chanting: "O Great Chief! be not angry——"

At that his voice choked in his throat; the hot blood surged to his brain, then ebbed away, and left him cold and powerless in fear. The Cree woman's arm dropped like a broken limb.

Above, the chief, long dead, slowly raised his head with a soft rustle, and peered down at them from wide eyes that glinted green and yellow and red in the silver moonlight. There was a fierce questioning look in the eyes as they searched these two who came in the night, as if asking why they had come to the sacred grave of a dead chief.



Mas-ki-sis was chanting : "O Great Chief! be not angry—"



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The two were powerless of speech in their terror; they were fascinated; their silence drew a shrill, harsh cackle that was a laugh, or a cry of anger, from the face on the bier.

The voice startled the huge squaw into volition; she turned heavily to run, still clutching the hand of Mas-ki-sis.

As she fled, the owner of the eyes, that was only a silly marsh-owl, spread his fan-like wings and swooped off into the haze of the prairie..:

Mi-yah-tis was on the trail, her big flat feet patting it with wondrous activity.

"Stop, mother!" panted the boy, the spirit of a brave chiding him for his empty fear. "Stop, mother; it is only oo-hoos (the owl), and we have not taken the powder."

The squaw had been shocked out of her borrowed bravery; she wanted to return to Wolf Runner, leaving the powder of Grass Head with the chief. But the boy argued: "Is it not true that Grass Head has gone away to the Happy Hunting Ground—is with God, as the teacher said? Would the owl rest on the cache if Grass Head were not gone away? Mas-ki-sis will get the powder—only he can't reach it. Come, we will take it to Wolf Runner."

Again they went back, strangely enough with less fear than before. The emptiness of their ter-

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ror because of the silly, short-eared little owl drove from the mind of Mi-yah-tis something of the spirit dread.

With quick steps she reached the cache, muttering to herself over and over, "Manitou, Manitou, Manitou!"

Grasping the horns, her eyes always on the ground, she plucked them from the post, and, turning with abruptness, hurried to the trail that led to where Wolf Runner slept by the little fire and dreamed of much food.

Mi-yah-tis hid the booty in her dress, saying to the boy: "When the sun has made us all of quiet mind, I will give the powder to Wolf Runner."

As they approached their camp the Indian started up; but he thought they had been for wood or water, and, with a querulous complaint because of his hunger, he slept again, oblivious of the fantastic spirits of imagination that tortured the Ugly One into a wide-eyed restlessness.

The wanderers up out of Elim were not more astonished the first morning of the manna shower than was Wolf Runner when he awoke and found himself possessed of the power to obtain food. He was also frightened; some great evil would surely accrue to them because of the powder-horns that were robbed from the dead chief. But hunger to the point of starvation is hunger indeed; also,

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he had not stolen from Grass Head. If Mi-yah-tis suffered for the theft, well, it was of her own doing.

They had nothing in which to carry the powder and shot unless they retained the horns; and Wolf Runner declared he would put them back on the cache some time.

That day they feasted as only starved Indians can feast when there is plenty.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was August when the trail-wearied Wolf Runner outfit came once again to Otter Creek at Fort Donald; and the mischief that had smouldered almost smokeless fanned suddenly into a fire of fierce resentment.

After the going of Wolf Runner, big Sandy had heard the malicious slander of the Cree woman's medicine-making. He felt sure that it was a manifestation of revenge originating in the family of Felix Benoit; so he kept his wise old eyes open for the return of the accused ones, that he might ward off the trouble that would possibly be visited upon their quite innocent heads.

When news of the Indian's return flashed through Fort Donald, surrounded by an atmosphere of threats, big Sandy and Malcolm went to the tepee of Wolf Runner.

With rare delicacy the old Scotchman said nothing of the medicine-making, but asked Wolf Runner to go back to Vermilion. The request only inflamed the sullen Indian's mind, and aroused him to an eloquent denunciation of his enemies.

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There was something fearfully tragic in Wolf Runner's rhetoric as his own words lashed him to articulate fury. Slowly enough he began to speak: "Once my people, the Wood Crees, were a mighty tribe; to be a Cree was to be a chief. When the Blackfeet stole horses, they stole from other tribes; when they stole from the Crees they died. My people were as the leaves of the forest, they were as the grass of the plain, and our children were as the yellow star-flowers that greet the eye everywhere. The prairie thronged with buffalo, and the buffalo were sweet eating, and made us strong, and we were happy; we had the buffalo-skins to make tepees that were warm, and we laughed at the cold wind, and the snow, and the rain.

"Our women were chaste; and in all the land there were not more women whose noses had been cut off than this," and Wolf Runner held aloft the spread fingers of his two hands, which meant that in all the Cree tribe were not ten women who had paid the debt of unchastity by the elision of a nose.

"The sun warmed the blood of the earth till it grew grass for our horses, and the buffalo, and the antelope; we listened to Manitou; and our medicine-men made medicine to the evil spirits to keep from us their anger.

"We were braves, and in the Happy Hunting

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Ground are many of our tribe that chase the buffalo.

"But the paleface came among us, even as Wiesah-ké-chack said the gray-eyed people would come, and what is my tribe now—what are the Crees? The palefaces took our lands, and our horses, and our women, and the braves of my tribe are as squaws, and work as squaws. And even now they are lean fed like famished wolves, and our women are unchaste as the white women.

"When the palefaces came first to our lodges, being few in numbers and weak, my people fed them; now, if an Indian asks food of the paleface he is told 'marse!' as we speak to our dogs. Unless a brave becomes as a squaw and works, he must die in the cold time, for the buffalo have been driven away and corralled, so that the Indian may be in the power of the paleface.

"Many moons ago did not your redcoats come to the tepee of Wolf Runner with a lie in their mouths that he was selling the fire-water, and stealing their horses—and was not Wolf Runner shut in a stone corral?

"But, Sandy Ogama, that of which Wolf Runner has spoken, is as nothing to the great misery that has now come to his heart; the Big Ogama, the ogama of the Great White Mother, kept Mas-kis at Fort Garry, and now Mas-ki-sis, who is son

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of Wolf Runner, and would have been a great brave, will soon pass to the Happy Hunting Ground. The heart of Wolf Runner is heavy with this knowledge; and his heart is full of evil for the palefaces because of this. Perhaps when Manitou calls Mas-ki-sis, when the cold spirit comes to the lodge and steals Mas-ki-sis away, perhaps Wolf Runner will become even as a fierce wolf, and send many palefaces to the Happy Hunting Ground."

"Don't let this wickedness possess you, brother," said Cameron, in Cree. Then, relapsing into his Scotch-flavored English, he spoke to Malcolm, for the Indian, exhausted by his passion, was silent.

"Malcolm, lad," said Sandy, "the poor de'il o' a pagan haes muckle truth on his side, though it's fair foolishness his talkin' o' takin' life. It was no the intent o' the Lord for the Injun to be hoosed, or worked like an ass or an ox. An' schoolin' 's fair thrown awa' on such. Hoosed up they jus' die like flies in a bottle; an' the poor bairnie is just stricken wi' the lung disease, an' that's the God's truth—poor little bairnie!"

"You're right, father," said Malcolm; "a nichie's a thousand times better nor a breed. A breed's part Injun, part white man, an' altogether devil."

The Indian broke in again. "And now Wolf

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Runner is to go back to Vermilion because he is old, like an outcast buffalo-bull that has no place in the herd; and there Mas-ki-sis will die."

"I dinna ken what to say," declared Sandy to Malcolm. "The breeds and nichies here are like a pack of coyotes; they're thinkin' Wolf Runner's squaw is makin' medicine, an' it's just dootful but what there'll be murder done."

"We'll get Factor Gourelot to give Wolf Runner a job of tradin' at Vermilion," said Malcolm, a bright thought taking him. "An' we must keep a sharp eye that the post people don't break out against him afore he gets away."

Sandy asked Wolf Runner to keep to himself for a time, and if anything went wrong to come to him.

Mas-ki-sis had understood a great deal of big Sandy's English; Cameron had forgotten all about the little lad's having been at the mission school for some months.

As the two white men walked away, Malcolm said, "Why didn't ye tell the nichie, father, that the camp was all possessed of the idea his squaw was makin' medicine?"

"I'll no hae onything tae do wi' such godless obsarvance," declared the father; "I'd no even mention it. An', foreby, if I spoke o' it to Wolf Runner while he's greetin' ower the bairn, most

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like he'd just mak' trouble wi' the ithers. We'll jus' get him awa', quiet like. I'm morally in charge o' Fort Donald, an' I dinna want bluidshed."

Mas-ki-sis watched the father and son as they went away. When they had passed slowly out of his sight, he sat for a long time looking across the prairie to where the red-splashed sky still flushed from the amorous kiss of the fleeing sun. Miles away on the western horizon a chain of hills lay draped in the red light like a city. Mas-ki-sis was picturing them into the wondrous build-ings he had seen at Fort Garry. In his hill-city, now silhouetted against the crimson west, were church-spires, slender pencilled pyramids of purple. They were really giant spruce and cedars that cut the sky-line, but the boy was building them into great churches and cathedrals. And perhaps he would soon have to leave all these beautiful things—the summer sky and the long-drawn-out evenings—that the Sun-God painted with bright ochre from the land of spirits; pass from the perfume of the sweet-grass and prairie-clover, the call of the birds, the heart-thrill of the chase, the tender caress of his mother—leave it all, and go to the Happy Hunting Ground, or, as he had been told at the school in Fort Garry, mayhap he would be called to the white man's heaven.

A wondrous lot of thinking had come to the lit-

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the man since the school matron had told him he must be very careful or he would die of the lung sickness. He remembered there had been tears in her eyes when he asked her not to tell his mother—Mi-yah-tis would only wail at night over this evil.

As he sat with his dream-face turned to the west a conviction came to him that he would not get well again. His people always died when stricken with the lung disease, they always went to the Happy Hunting Ground. Even now his strength was not coming back to him. No, Mi-yah-tis would soon be without Mas-ki-sis. Poor old Mi-yah-tis, of whom the villagers were talking evil, as the white men had said.

Then a thought of the danger that threatened from the villagers occurred to him. He would watch, and also plead with Wolf Runner to go back to Vermilion.

CHAPTER XXXVII

As the purple light died out of the western sky, and the flowers and the gaudy leaves and the grass lost their identity of pattern in the gray that spread over the earth, Mas-ki-sis slipped away from the lodge and wandered among the poplars, and on to the tepees of the creek dwellers. In front of the lodge of Nistas an Indian thumped his tom-tom; its sonorous boom was a gathering-call—a summons to the dwellers to meet. Perhaps they were going to gamble, for they often played throughout the whole night.

As the Indians and breeds assembled, Mas-ki-sis saw there was no preparation for a gambling-bout; there was no circle formed of figures squatted on the ground, their knees covered by a blanket under which the player hid the guessing bean. It must be a council, the little lad thought, as he sat in the low bushes and watched. The words of big Sandy rang in his ears—"The breeds and nichies are like coyotes—there'll be murder done." What if this gathering was for the purpose of plotting against the lodge of Wolf Runner?

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The boy became fascinated by the terrible idea; if he could but find out—could but hear. Well he knew the method of the Crees when one of the tribe was denounced as a witch or a weh-tigo (one possessed of an evil spirit). The Indians, taking their own safety as justification, acted with barbaric ferocity; the accused one was executed without compunction and without trial.

Those who had answered the imperious call of the tom-tom had passed into the big lodge of Nistas. Night had come, folding its bat wings of darkness about the tepees. Mas-ki-sis crept tremblingly to the back of the council lodge, and lying flat on the earth, listened to those who talked within. Surely it was some good spirit, watching over the simple-minded old squaw whose heart was filled with no greater evil than faithfulness to her husband and immeasurable love for her little son, that had drawn the boy within hearing of the superstitious ones that plotted in the tepee of Nistas.

Undoubtedly all the troubles that had come to them were of the medicine-making of Wolf Runner's squaw; Mas-ki-sis heard that through the skin walls. Then Nistas told once more of having seen the Cree woman with the little figure that was certainly bad medicine. Now Wolf Runner and his evil woman had come back again, and more

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trouble would accrue to the good people of Otter Creek.

There could be no harm in destroying the mischief-maker; even if Wolf Runner, and the boy that was Mas-ki-sis, were also killed, there would be no one to tell the redcoats of how they had come by their deaths. The palefaces who were of the Government cared not for the ways of the red men that had been for all time, and would seek to send to Stony Mountain the executioners of the wicked Wolf Runner and his squaw. Had it not been their way, the way of the Crees, even before the time of the great chief Sweet-Grass, that a wehtigo, or one who made bad medicine, should be put to death?

And Nistas, who had the wisdom of a carcajou, said that they might take the bodies in a cart to the great muskeg, saying that Wolf Runner had gone away, and nobody would know of their righteous act.

Ugh! if Nistas had been a brave, she would have made a great chief because of her wisdom.

That night, as those in Wolf Runner's tepee slept, this act of justice would be completed; for the faith of the Crees was that one who was killed in the hour of darkness went not to the Happy Hunting Ground.

Mas-ki-sis had heard enough. He wormed his

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thin body away from the tepee, and ran with soft steps a little into the poplar bluff. How was he to save his people?

Once he started in haste to warn them; suddenly he stopped. Like a vision all that would happen flashed before the eyes of his mind, made acute by intensity of feeling. The evil ones in Nista's tepee had said: "When Wolf Runner and those of his lodge sleep, we will do this thing."

Mas-ki-sis knew that until he returned, his mother would keep the little fire ablaze with dry sticks, and would sit and wait for him. Even if the slayers crept close they would see the broad shadow of Mi-yah-tis reflected on the thin walls of the lodge by the fire-light, and would know that they were still awake. If he went now and warned Wolf Runner there would be bustle; perhaps his father, who was of a fierce mind, might refuse to be controlled, and precipitate the evil. If they fled, the others would pursue, and there would be no escape. There was but one hope—Sandy Ogama. Yes, weak as he was, unequal to the task, Mas-ki-sis must race to the shack of their big friend and save his parents.

Through the night-gloom the little Indian sped over the mile trail that stretched to Fort Donald, many times the poor, worn-out lungs choking and holding not enough of air to vitalize his body.



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Then he would rest for a few seconds, fearful that his cough would cause someone to stop him. Once—it was near the end of the journey that had lasted for a lifetime, for years and years—as he choked, he put his hand to his lips and something hot and wet splashed against it. How weak he was—how slow he moved! He was running in a nightmare—his limbs were of lead; and the night-air was heavy with hot ashes or dust, or something that smothered. Surely he had been an hour coming that long, dark, tortuous mile; and his poor old mother, innocent of harm to anything or anybody, would be slain. “O Manitou! O God!”—for in the mission they had taught him to pray to God—“just for a little strength to reach Sandy Ogama’s shack.” After that what came to himself did not matter.

Running feebly down the one street of Fort Donald, just at the Company’s store he struck full into a body of much weight; the shock brought him to his knees. A rough voice cursed him, and a strong hand grasped his collar. Surely Manitou—even God—had forsaken him. The tattered life was so frail that he felt it slipping away. In his ears was the noise of tom-toms, and bells such as braves wore at the Sun-Dance. Was he journeying to the Happy Hunting Ground?

A rude shake at his collar brought back his wa-

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vering senses; it loosened his lungs so they worked again. He had strength for just one cry. "Ogama Sandy!" he called; and his voice was piteous in its appeal for help.

Then the rolling thunder of the tom-toms possessed him again; but it was the noise of heavy feet, and a rough Scotch voice was saying: "What are ye up to with that kid, ye damn' nichie?"

Mas-ki-sis knew the voice; it was Malcolm's. The hand cast loose from his collar, and its owner, muttering, slipped away in the gloom.

"O Ogama," said the boy, in Cree, "those of a bad heart are even now preparing a death for Mi-yah-tis; I was going to Sandy Ogama."

"Mas-ki-sis!" exclaimed Malcolm, in astonishment; "ye poor little lad!"

Gathering the boy in his arms the Scot raced, strong-legged, to the shack of his father. There Mas-ki-sis—and Malcolm still had him in his arms—told of the plot.

"Man, I thocht it—I feared it," commented Cameron. "Wife, ye'll just watch the bairnie—may the Lord spare the little nichie, for yon's red on his lips, I'm thinkin'." Then the big Scotchman's voice choked, and, reaching a rifle from the wall above his bed, he handed a shot-gun to Malcolm. "The imps o' Satan'll no' do their wicked work the night, please God we're no' too late.

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Nurse the bairn, wife; just haud him in yer arms, an' dinna let him d'e, for he's a Christian."

"Hurry, Ogama!" gasped Mas-ki-sis.

"Come, Malcolm. Dinna let him d'e, wife."

And out into the night that was jewelled beyond all count with star gems set high, and that seemed so full of peace and quiet on earth, the two hurried. At the Company's Residence, Sandy banged the door with his hard knuckles until it jumped on its hinges.

As it swung open, Cameron, standing on the step, called to Gourelot, who was just within: "Factor, we're awa' doon'tae Otter Creek. The de'ls are for murderin' the ould wife o' Wolf Runner. Hitch up yer buckboard, mon, an' mak' haste doon."

Before the plump Frenchman, astonished to silence, could find speech, Cameron was lost in the night.

There was only the rhythmic murmur of the Saskatchewan waters as they glided swiftly by the smooth-worn mud-banks, and over them hung a cloud of white vapor. The face of the land was blotted to an indistinct unison, and the two men, hurrying forward, silent, kept the trail by its hard response to their moccasined feet.

At a dog lope they went. As they dipped into the hollow of Otter Creek, Sandy stretched his

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arm across his son's chest to stay his eagerness. With the silent step of wood-dwellers they continued through the poplar bluff.

But their caution was unneeded. A small replica of Hades had been originated in the tepee of Wolf Runner. Torches flared on the outside and fierce voices clamored within.

"We're too late," moaned Sandy; "ma God! we're too late! Into them, lad! If Wolf Runner's no' deid, we'll fight for his life."

With a rush the giant Scotchman charged through the crowd that surrounded the tepee; the guards were bowled over like ten-pins, and the two white men stood within the lodge, holding their weapons as clubs.

If Wie-sah-ke-chack himself had suddenly dropped through the opening at the apex of the conical structure the murderous Indians would not have been more startled.

Wolf Runner and Mi-yah-tis were lying on the ground most securely enmeshed in shaganappi bonds. The tepee was crowded with the tribal.

At once an angry babel of imprecation went up from many throats. "The paleface dogs! The sons of dogs! The moneas who before had destroyed the fire-water!" And in an instant, from the outside, angry faces were thrust into the tent

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—the faces of those who had been hurried to earth by the onslaught of the Hielandmen.

Their own buzzing instilled courage into the Indians; and at best there were but two of the hated white skins. An Indian acts with the erratic irresponsibility of a rattlesnake; and a big Cree, possessed of a sudden desire to distinguish himself, whipped out a horn-handled buffalo-knife, and, springing forward, lunged at Malcolm's broad chest. The knife would surely have gone home, through a lung at least, had not Sandy's massive fist fallen athwart the brave's nose, to the utter demolition of the latter.

“Be quiet, dog o' a nichie!” roared the Scotchman, as the redskin pitched headlong to the mud floor.

“Hold! dinna shoot!” Sandy ejaculated, throwing up the gun that Malcolm had levelled at the crumpled knifer. Then, clubbing his own Winchester, he glared at the Indians, and said: “The first one that makes mischief, I'll smash him. Ye just talk in peace, friends,” he continued, “for ye'll all get into trouble o'er this.”

It was Nistas, Nistas the much wise, who stood forward; and in her mind was a quiet plan that was to save them from the consequences of their frustrated crime.

“My friends, the ogama is right. We are as

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foolish as children. I will speak with a straight tongue, because we are all honest, and if there is no lie, there will be no trouble. We have done no harm," she continued, addressing big Sandy; "Wolf Runner's woman made bad medicine against many of my people. I, who am Nistas, saw the medicine. Then the woman of Wolf Runner went away because Nistas had seen this. Now she has come back, and my people have tied Wolf Runner because he threatened to kill us. We, being afraid of the bad medicine, came to take the woman of Wolf Runner to the factor ogama, that he might send her away forever. That is all my people have done—for that we are here."

"Of all the liars!" exclaimed Malcolm.

"She's that," commented Sandy; "but ye'll no prove it. Untie them," he commanded, nodding to the bound prisoners. "The factor'll be here, an' we'll see into this."

And sure enough, as he ceased speaking, Louis Gourelot, having come in his buckboard, and with him being as many men as could cling to the old vehicle, came puffing and elbowing his way into the tepee.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried; "always trouble from ze nichie. Have they kill somebody, M'sieu Sandy?"

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Cameron explained. Also they must constitute themselves into a court of inquiry. It was all very well to knock flat a charging Indian with a knife in his hand, in fact, it was the proper thing to do; but the Indians as a body were like children—they believed in the godless medicine-making, which was a play-toy of the devil, according to the Calvinist. But still, they, as Christians, and having the welfare of the Company at heart, must humor the pagans, and pacify the many by punishing somebody.

Sandy, speaking with the factor on the side, declared his belief that Nistas had been practising the medicine-making for gain; and to shield herself, and out of revenge against Wolf Runner, had accused Mi-yah-tis.

"Now," said big Sandy, turning to the Indians, "we must put a stop to the medicine-making; and the factor will just discover the guilty one. Who will speak first?"

"It is the woman of Wolf Runner," said Nistas. "See, Ogama, here is the medicine we found where she hid it."

It was the little birch-bark image of Mas-kis that the mother, out of a yearning love, had dreamed into an actual presence of the boy. Poor, harmless little toy, crude embodiment of her superb affection, conjured by the evil Nistas into a

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condemning instrument that had all but caused its creator's death.

"What say you, Mi-yah-tis?" asked the factor.

"It is only little Mas-ki-sis," pleaded the woman. "When my heart was feeling long, this that was Mas-ki-sis——"

Sandy suddenly remembered something which in the excitement he had forgotten. "Mas-ki-sis is at my shack," he said, speaking to the Cree woman.

Her eyes lighted up with joy; she had been too frightened to ask for him.

Then she spoke again: "I think it is Nistas who has cast the evil eye upon Mas-ki-sis, for he droops like the purple moose-flower when the hot wind of the forest-fire passes over it. I think it is Nistas who made the bad medicine in the tepees of Otter Creek; she is a medicine-woman; I am only woman of Wolf Runner, to keep his lodge in order and take care of Mas-ki-sis. I did not know that the people spoke ill of me when I went to Fort Garry; then I came back, and to-night, when it was dark, I went out to look for little Otter—for he was not in the lodge—and these people took hold of me, crying they would kill me because of something. Then the ogama came; that is all Mi-yah-tis knows."

"That's no lie," commented Malcolm.

"Is there another to speak?" queried Sandy.

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Then Many Flowers, a Cree woman who had been standing at the door, came forward and said: "O, Ogama, this Evil Spirit that makes trouble is in the lodge of Nistas; and because of that Little Bear, who is the husband of Many Flowers, has been taken from me. Did not Half Moon give Nistas the tobacco, and the red shawl, and many things to make medicine that Little Bear might sit in her lodge, leaving Many Flowers to cry, and cry, and be alone? That is truth, Ogama, and in the box that is in Nistas's lodge is the bad medicine. It is not the woman of Wolf Runner. She is stupid, like a she-bear that eats many berries; she knows not medicine-making. Many Flowers was afraid and did not speak, but the ogama is here, and she is not afraid now."

"You hear," said Cameron. "If it is the truth, we will find the medicine as Many Flowers says. We will go to the lodge of Nistas."

There was neither assent nor dissent from the Indians. Nistas, unsuspected of the evil, might be accepted as a leader; but if she were a maker of bad medicine, perhaps they would also put her to death with the clubs, as they would have visited crude justice upon the woman of Wolf Runner.

"We will go together," said Sandy. And to Malcolm he added: "Dinna let the she-fox gie us the slip tae hide onything."

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The court was adjourned to the other lodge; and a search brought forth a most complete outfit for the manipulation of spirit influences. Nistas's stock-in-trade was in a small hardwood box, brass-bound on the corners.

It was Sandy who explored its contents. An elk's tusk carved with strange symbols; a little ivory fish studded with inlaid dots of iron—this had come from the land of the Eskimo; a string of toe-bones; a fragment of scalp-lock; and three little packets of human hair bound together: all these barbaric trinkets were brought forth.

"O Ogama," said Many Flowers, "this is not the medicine of Little Bear—it is that," as Sandy lifted out a roll of red cloth. The Scotchman unwound yards of the thin strip; and then there was a wrapping of silk-like birch-bark, and the very core of it was two small figures bound together with the hair of Nistas.

"It is Little Bear," commented Many Flowers.

"It is the bad medicine," ejaculated an old Indian who was versed in such matters.

"What think you, nichies?" asked Cameron.

The old Indian of medicine-knowledge spoke: "O, Ogama, Nistas should tell us with straight speech that she has done this thing, so that we may put her to death like a wehtigo, for that is the way of our people. If Nistas speaks with a forked

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tongue, and says she has not done this, we can put no one to death, and the evil will still be upon us."

"Factor," Sandy said, "they're awfu' pagans. Wha's the proper thing tae do, Mon?"

"Mon Dieu, M'sieu Sandy, la femme is ze devil-always.—We mus' take Nistas to ze fort an' p'raps send her to Stony Mountain."

"I'm thinkin' they'll mak' trouble if we dinna let them kill somebody—they're bloodthirsty de'ils. But I hae a plan."

"Oui, M'sieu. Always you have ze good plan. If you knock ze nichie flat, that is good; if you feed him, hurrah! Big Sandy is ogama. Très bien, allez, M'sieu."

Sanctioned, Cameron spoke to the Indians, saying that he would burn the medicine, and make the white man's prayer, which would forever drive it from the camp; they would send Nistas away, because if she were put to death the redcoats would surely come and hang every one of them.

This innovation provoked discussion of interminable length. It was difficult to understand of their untutored minds why they should be punished if Nistas were cut off from her wickedness. But they were accustomed to bend to the will of the great Company, and in the end Sandy's plan was adopted.

The white men, when the work of justice had

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been completed, journeyed back to Fort Donald, taking Nistas with them.

Speaking to Factor Gourelot, just as they started, Cameron said: "We'll take the auld wife o' Wolf Runner, for I'm thinkin' the puir body'll find Mas-ki-sis-deid, or close-tae-it. Puir-body! Man! but the little Indian came like a Christian to save his auld mither. God grant the puir laddie is no' sae bad; but I'm afeared o' it, mon, I'm afeared o' it. Puir laddie.

"Just gie the auld body a lift i' the buckboard, Factor, I'll walk—I'm no tired; an' Malcolm'll walk."

The buckboard went no faster than the others strode, and together they came to the shack of Cameron. Big Sandy called, "Jeanie! Jeanie!" and, when the door was opened, he gently pushed the Cree woman inside, and, closing it, stood with his back to it.

"I'll no' go in just yet, Factor," he said. "I dinna want tae look at the little Christian for a bit."

And when the others had gone, big Cameron, huge in structure and great in gentleness, stood in the damp night-air, knowing that Jeanie, who was a mother, and the Cree woman, who was mother to Mas-ki-sis, would be better alone. And above him, in the dead-gray wall of night, hung a blood-red moon.

